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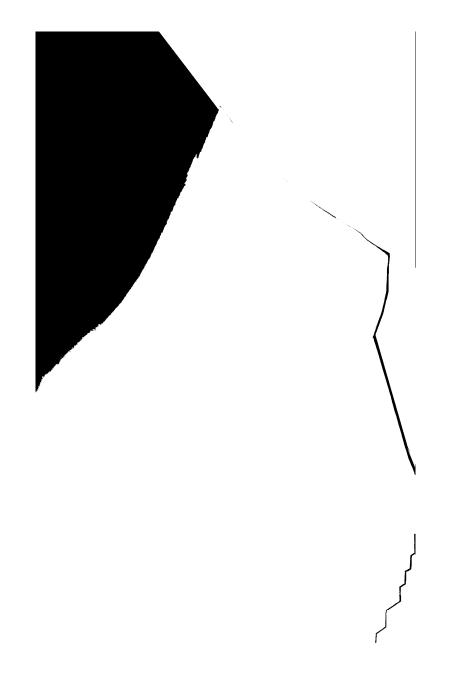
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VICAR OF OLD WARDEN, BEDS:

AUTHOR OF 'BEDSIDE BEADINGS,' 'THE ODD FIVE MINUTES,' ETC. ETC.

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SHORT SERMONS.

SERMON I.

THE ENDURING WORDS.

Luke, xxi. 33.—' Heaven and earth shall pass away; but My words shall not pass away.'

ALL things around us are passing away, and man himself is passing away too.

All the works of man are passing away, even those which are strongest and most durable. A house, a castle, a church, may last for hundreds of years, and be a wonder to all for its antiquity; yet it is passing away. It wants constant repair, and, if left neglected, soon goes to decay. Many a crumbling ruin throughout the land reminds us of this.

Man himself passes away, and that more quickly than many of his works. Where are the men who used to attack and defend that ancient castle? Where are the former dwellers in that old house? Where are the worshippers who, generation after generation, knelt in that venerable church? They are all passed away. The buildings remain, but the men are gone.

Even the works of God are passing away: 'Heaven and earth shall pass away,'—that is, the earth and the sky. The earth, on which man has trodden ever since he was formed,—'the everlasting hills,' which have looked down on so many changes, and yet have remained unchanged themselves,—the sky, to which the eyes of man have been lifted ever since he was placed on the earth,—even these, which seem so lasting, are passing away.* So greatly is this earth to be changed, that it is said to pass away, and to become a new earth.

If man and man's works, if even the outward works of God, if all the things which we look upon, are thus to pass away, is there anything which is *not* to pass away?

Yes; the Lord Jesus Christ said, 'Heaven and earth shall pass away; but my words shall

^{*} Rev. xxi. 1.

not pass away.' This strikes us as surprising. That what seemed so great should pass away, and that what seemed so humble should remain! 'My words!'-the words of one who was in appearance but a poor, weak man, and those words spoken to a few unlearned people in a distant part of the world. If any of the proud and learned and great of those days had known of His words, doubtless they would have thought them almost beneath their notice. What mattered it what that humble teacher said to those poor men? Of what importance were His words, compared with great concerns of state, with riches, with pleasures, with business, with cities, with kingdoms? Yet these, and more than these, should pass away, while His words should endure. His words were more important and more lasting than even the earth and the sky.

What our Lord said about His words may be applied both to the words He was speaking at that time, and also to His words in general. In the first sense, what He said has already been partly shown to be true. Among other things, He was telling His disciples then of great wars and troubles that were to come. Jerusalem, where He was speaking, was to be

destroyed, and its people dispersed. That has taken place long ago. And so will all that He spoke of at the same time. He speaks for instance (ver. 36) of the 'standing before the Son of Man:' and that must refer to the end of all things. That also will come to pass in its time.

In short, everything that He was then saying either has come to pass, or will. Great changes have taken place, and greater still are yet to come. History tells us of wars and commotions, of battles fought, of cities taken, of governments changed, of one thing and another thing passing away; but the words of Jesus still endure. Through all changes, what He said remains true, and must all be fulfilled.

But this is only one view of the text. There is another and wider view. It is equally true of all His words; 'Heaven and earth shall pass away: but my words shall not pass away.'

How many words He spoke!—words of truth, words of comfort, words of hope, words of salvation, words of life, words of warning. His words are *lasting* words; they will never pass away. It is true of every word that He ever spoke, 'My words shall not pass away.'

We have in the Gospel of St. John more of

the words of Jesus than in any other part of the Bible. Let us look at some of the words 'God so loved the world, that written there. he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.'* 'My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me: and I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand.'+ 'Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you.' : 'I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that He may abide with you for ever, even the Spirit of truth. . . . I will not leave you comfortless, I will come to you. . . . Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid.' §

These are some of the words of Jesus. If any one could throw a shade of doubt or uncertainty over them, could prove them to be

^{*} John, iii. 16.

[†] John, x. 27, 28.

[‡] John, xiv. 1, 2.

[§] John, xiv. 16-18, 27.

meant only for that time and for those disciples, or could persuade us that, though kindly spoken, they will not really be accomplished, how sad and helpless our case would be! But none can do so. He who spoke thus said also, 'Heaven and earth shall pass away; but my words shall not pass away.'

His truth, His word, is our stronghold. Let us believe it firmly, and trust in it without a doubt. Through all time, through all changes, His word will stand. Every hope that He gave shall be fulfilled, every encouraging assurance shall be made good. Not one word shall fail. The pardon, peace, life, and safety, the Spirit's abiding presence, the heavenly home,—all are real and true, all are given, or will be given, according to His word. Let us trust, and be of good cheer.

He also gave many gracious invitations. He spoke words for those afar off, as well as for those who have been brought near. 'Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.'* 'Him that cometh to me I will in nowise cast out.'† Those words still remain; that invitation is not withdrawn. His gracious call to sinners,

^{*} Matt. xi. 28.

⁺ John, vi. 37.

His loving messages, His encouraging promises, may be fully relied on. They are surer than earth and sky. He has not gone back from them, and never will as long as the day of grace shall last. Many things are changed, but there is no change here. Jesus still invites, and still makes offer of His free salvation.

But sometimes He spoke in a different way. The words that follow are words of His also. 'Strive to enter in at the strait gate: for many I say unto you, will seek to enter in, and shall not be able. When once the master of the house hath risen up, and hath shut to the door, and ye begin to stand without, and to knock at the door, saying, Lord, Lord, open unto us; and he shall answer and say unto you, I know you not whence ye are: . . . depart from me, all ye workers of iniquity.'* He spoke solemn words also of the sheep and the goats;† of the wheat and the tares.*

All these solemn words, all these words of warning, are as sure and true as the rest of the words of Jesus. There is no difference: all that He ever said is equally true. His words

^{*} Luke, xiii. 24–27. + Matt. xxv. 81–46. ± Matt. xiii. 24–30.

cannot pass away. Every warning, every woe, every awful threatening, every terrible forewarning of what awaits the impenitent, will be fulfilled. 'Heaven and earth shall pass away; but my words shall not pass away.'

Oh, do not disregard His words, do not treat them lightly, do not put off the great concern, do not wait to prove the awful sureness of His voice of warning. Seek Him now,—seek Him without delay. Let not those other words of His be true of you; 'Ye will not come to me, that ye might have life.'*

^{*} John, v. 40.

SERMON II.

THE EARLY PRAYER.

Mark, i. 35.—'And in the morning, rising up a great while before day, he went out and departed into a solitary place, and there prayed.'

When the Son of God became man, He took upon Him our nature in all its parts except its sinfulness. As man He had wants to be supplied, bodily weakness to be strengthened, sorrows under which He stood in need of comfort. When we consider this, we are not surprised to find Him praying. We know that He did often pray. On some occasions the very words He used are told us. On others we only know that He prayed. But this is quite certain, that prayer was His constant habit.

Jesus is our example. We are not only to look to Him as our Saviour, who by His death

made atonement for our sins, but we are also to follow Him in His life as our pattern. We are to strive to be like Him. We ought to love as He loved, to be kind as He was kind, and holy as He was holy; like Him to forgive those who have injured us, and to go about doing good. And here we have another point in which to follow Him; we ought to take Him as our example in praying.

The vast difference between Him and us does but make His example in this point the more forcible. For if He prayed, who had no sins to be forgiven, how should we pray, over whom not a day passes that does not leave behind it some stain of sin, which nothing but His precious blood can wash away, and who in our utter weakness stand in constant need of guidance, grace, and strength!

Let us see therefore what our Lord's example here teaches us.

We may notice three things about His prayer:—

- 1. It was private prayer;
- 2. It was morning prayer; and
- 3. It was prayer in spite of hindrances.

In all these respects we may learn from His example.

1. This was private prayer. 'He went out, and departed into a solitary place, and there prayed.' On most other occasions when He wished to be apart from the multitude, He yet took some of His disciples as His companions; but here He chose to be quite alone. While they were still sleeping, He went out by Himself to pray.

We ought every day to have some time alone with God. Our Lord taught us this when He said, 'Thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret.' He here teaches us the same by His example. There, with no human eye upon us, we can pray freely, and tell to our Father our most secret feelings, and confess to Him our inmost faults, and lay before Him every trouble and anxiety.

Nothing can supply the place of private prayer. Public worship and family prayer have each their special uses, but they must not be made an excuse for the neglect of prayer alone with God.

Never omit this. Let it be a daily thing. The soul cannot prosper without secret prayer. The growing cold or careless in this will surely lead to a general going back in spiritual things.

2. This prayer of our Lord was morning prayer.

It was thus that He began the day. Nay, His prayer was before daybreak. 'In the morning, rising up a great while before day.' Thus should we begin every day, giving our freshest thoughts to God, and seeking His help before the difficulties of the day begin. The mercies of the night should not be suffered to fade away from the mind without thanks, or to be lost in the new mercies which every day brings. Thanksgiving and prayer should be the first work of each day.

We know not what a day may bring forth. Every day brings with it its own duties, difficulties, and temptations. Oftentimes most unexpected things arise. The post brings some news by which our mind is filled with anxiety. Some one comes to see us, whose visit changes the whole tone of our feelings. A sudden trial of temper, an unlooked-for temptation to sin, may arise at any moment. It happens not seldom that, when we have risen all bright and cheerful, before an hour is gone by something has happened which has ruffled our spirit and cast a cloud over our day. It is well to be prepared for all by prayer. He who has passed

the first portion of the day alone with God comes down to the cares and duties of life like a soldier going into battle with his armour on; while he who begins the day without prayer is like one defenceless and unarmed.

If we do not secure the *first* of the day for prayer, we may find no time for it till the day is gone. Other things will fill the mind, the bustle of the world will be around us, and even if *time* for prayer be not wanting, we shall have lost the still morning hour, when the thoughts are most fresh and clear. Before the world fills the heart then, be with God in secret prayer.

3. Have you hindrances? So had our blessed Lord. But He prayed in spite of hindrances. This is our third point.

He led a busy life. Not busy, as the lives of many are, in the pursuit of gain, or of any selfish object. He was busy in doing good. Just before the text we read that 'at even, when the sun did set, they brought unto Him all that were diseased, and them that were possessed with devils. And all the city was gathered together at the door. And He healed many that were sick of divers diseases, and cast out many devils.' It was thus that a day of

toil was closed. Nor was this an unusual day with Him. Such was His life; an active, laborious life; a life spent much in public. He was generally surrounded by a crowd, and His disciples were almost always with Him: as far as we can judge, He had little time to Himself. After such a day He must have wanted rest. Sleep was welcome to our Lord, when weary in body and weary in mind; as welcome as it is to us. He wanted rest, but He wanted prayer more. So He did not give many hours to sleep, but long before daybreak rose to pray.

How does this shame our sloth! How ready are we to make excuses to ourselves for a hurried morning prayer, or perhaps for no prayer at all! How small a hindrance is suffered to stand in the way!

Not that there are not real hindrances with some. Those of us who live an easy and regular life have indeed no hindrance that may not easily be overcome. But it is not so with all. The labouring man, the poor mother of a large young family, the servant in a busy household—indeed, all who have to rise early and to work hard, have a real hindrance; but not a hindrance that may not be overcome. Jesus overcame the hindrances that lay in His

way; let His followers set themselves to do the same. You may lead a busy life, yet pray. Your daily work may begin early, yet let your secret prayer be earlier still. If you cannot find a place to be alone in before you leave your home, yet let your heart be alone with God; give Him your first thoughts, fear not to kneel down before others, and perhaps as you go to your work you may find a further time for solitary prayer. The busy mother may get a few quiet moments before her household work begins. The servant may rise a few minutes earlier to secure the most precious time of all the day. He who has ordered our lot has placed none of us in such circumstances that we cannot pray. It is His will that we should pray, and He will help us to overcome every hindrance. We may pray if we will.

Yes; it is the will that is chiefly wanting. It is not strange that it should be so with those who have never known the worth of prayer, and whose prayers have never been anything better than a heartless form. But it is strange that they who have experienced the comfort and blessing of prayer should ever be slothful in praying. Yet so it is. Often have we prayed, and received a gracious answer; often

have we been comforted, helped, strengthened, in answer to prayer; yet still how backward we often are to pray, how much we need to be stirred up and quickened in the work!

As you love your Saviour, and desire His grace and blessing, follow His example in prayer. If you would have your days peaceful and happy, begin each day with prayer. If you would meet the temptations and difficulties of each day aright, if you would not sink under its burden of cares, if you would maintain throughout the day a spiritual frame, and enjoy holy and happy thoughts—let prayer be your earliest work. Whatever other times and ways of prayer you may have, pray in private, pray in the morning; and let no hindrance keep you from it.

SERMON III.

NOT FAR OFF.

MARK, xii. 84.—'And when Jesus saw that he answered discreetly, he said unto him, Thou art not far from the kingdom of God.'

THE scribes in general were opposed to Christ and His Word; but this man was not so. He seems to have been a sincere and earnest enquirer after the truth. He had heard Jesus discoursing with the Sadducees about the resurrection; and when they were silenced, perceiving that our Lord had answered them well, he himself came to Him with a question, but in a very different spirit from theirs. They asked in a mocking, cavilling spirit, thinking to place Jesus in a difficulty; he in the spirit of a sincere and humble enquirer.

'Which is the first commandment of all?'

This was his question. What ought he to do above all? What should be the chief object of his desires and endeavours? Our Lord answered him at once. The first of all the commandments was love to God; the second was love to man. 'Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength. Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.'

Again the scribe entirely approved of what our Lord said. This was what he himself had believed before, and he was now confirmed in the belief. His answer is remarkable: 'Well. Master, Thou hast said the truth: for there is one God, and there is none other but He; and to love Him with all the heart, and with all the understanding, and with all the soul, and with all the strength, and to love his neighbour as himself, is more than all whole burnt-offerings and sacrifices.' This was much for such a man to say. He was a Jew, a minister of the Jewish religion, a religion which outwardly consisted mainly in sacrifices. He had been used to these sacrifices all his life, and he must have known well that most of those around him made the whole of religion to consist in its ceremonial parts. Yet he was able to see beyond them, and

to perceive the spiritual nature of true religion; that it is not outward merely, but inward, a thing of the heart; and that love—love to God above all, and then love to man—is the chief and most important point in it, far more important than any outward observances whatever.

Our Lord approved his answer. He saw that he answered discreetly,—that is, with wisdom and understanding,—and He said to him, 'Thou art not far from the kingdom of God.' He did not mean from heaven, but from the kingdom of God upon earth, from the gospel. His heart was in a state to receive the gospel. He could look beyond forms. He saw the spiritual nature of religion. He knew something of the love of God. Such a man was prepared to welcome the Saviour. He would probably listen gladly to the gospel, when made known to him.

We know no more of this scribe; but we can have little doubt that he did become a follower of Christ, a scribe 'instructed unto the kingdom of heaven.'

There are several lessons for us in this account.

1. The Lord Jesus Christ knows the spiritual

state of each. He knew that of the scribe, not merely from what he said, but also because He could read his heart. Jesus knew that his words expressed his true feelings. He can read our hearts too; He knows all that we feel. At this very time He knows what is our state with regard to 'the kingdom of God;' whether we belong to it, whether we are near to it. He does not judge by mere profession, or by outward religious observances. He knows our real state.

2. The hopeful point in the scribe was this, that he saw religion to be a thing of the heart, and that he put love to God above all that was outward and formal; and this, although he had not the light of the gospel, and did not know God in Christ. It is plain that his own heart was affected, in some measure at least.

It is always a hopeful sign when religion begins to be seen and felt to be a thing of the heart, and when the affections become in any measure engaged in it. With many, religion is but a formal thing, quite cold and heartless, with no life or love whatever. Great is the change, when the first spark of love to God is kindled in the heart, when the feelings first become

interested, when a new warmth of earnestness begins to be felt. Many in whom such a change has begun hardly dare indeed at present to think that any true change has been wrought in them. The coldness of their affections in religion and their want of love to God are what they are constantly complaining of. They hardly dare to think that they love Him at all. Yet they wish to love Him, and are conscious of their want of love, and feel a new sense within them of the necessity of spiritual religion. They are now deeply convinced that religion is something more than a round of outward observances. Surely this is of God.

3. Jesus used words of encouragement to the scribes. He recognised the favourable signs in him, and spoke in such a way as to give him hope and to lead him on.

Our Lord does not break the bruised reed, nor quench the smoking flax. He does not despise the day of small things. Rather He would encourage every beginner in spiritual things, every honest enquirer. Does any one think more seriously than he used to think? Is he beginning to see the spirituality of religion? Is he more in earnest, caring more for his soul,

really seeking after the truth? Does he wish to believe, to love God, to do His will? Whatever imperfections there may be in the thoughts and feelings of such an one, the gracious Saviour does not despise or disregard him. The judgment of men might fasten on what is faulty or inconsistent in his feelings; Jesus notices what is true and sincere, and encourages him to go He said to the scribe, 'Thou art not forward. far from the kingdom of God;' doubtless in order to lead him on still further; and such is His gracious will towards every sincere and humble enquirer. Let not such be faint-hearted. Let them seek him yet more earnestly, and seek He is willing to be found of them that seek Him. He is waiting to be gracious. God will give His Holy Spirit to them that ask Him.

4. But there is warning here also. Our Lord encouraged this man, by telling him that he was not far off; but He would not that he should stop where he was. The very words, 'Thou art not far,' seem to imply that he had not yet reached the desired point.

There are many who seem well content if they car but think they are 'not far from the kingdom of God.' There they stop, and seek to go no further. There are hopeful signs in them. They show some attention and seriousness. They approve right doctrine, and are well disposed to spiritual religion. But beyond this point they do not seem to advance. Alas! this will never save. To be 'not far from the kingdom of God' is not enough. We must be in the kingdom, and of the kingdom. We must not stop short of Christ. We must not rest satisfied with being in a state of mind which seems favourable for receiving the gospel. We must actually receive and embrace it,—we must come to Christ.

We know more than the scribe knew. We have far clearer light; we have the full gospel; we know of a crucified Saviour, and of redeeming love, and of the Holy Spirit. Let none stand still; coming near, as it were, and there stopping. Sad will it be hereafter for all those, of whom the best that can be said will be, that once they seemed not far from the kingdom of God! Oh, do not stop. Be encouraged, but be not satisfied. Press toward the mark. Lay hold on Christ by faith. Seek a saving interest in Him. Never rest till you are His—His now, and His for ever.

SERMON IV.

THE UNIVERSAL RULE.

Col. iii. 17.—'And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him.'

Religion, to be anything real, must be a thing of the whole life and conduct, influencing a man in all that he does, and forming his character under all circumstances. 'Whatsoever ye do, in word or deed,' says the apostle. There cannot be a fuller description of the whole conduct; for this comprises all we do and all we say.

All is to be governed by one principle. There must be a likeness, a consistency, in all parts of the Christian's conduct. In whatever company he may be, whether with those who fear God or with those who fear Him not, he must show himself a Christian still. In whatever circum-

stances he may be placed, whatever he may have to do, whatever events may befall him, the same character and principles should be seen in him. If he is one man with some people, and quite another man with others; if he appears serious and devout at times, but careless and worldly at others, how can his religion be real? The Bible direction as to when and where the Christian character is to be shown is simple and comprehensive: 'Whatsoever ye do in word or deed.'

And the rule which is thus to govern the whole conduct, is equally simple: 'Do all in the name of the Lord Jesus.' Let us dwell awhile on this rule, so simple and yet so full. We may take it to mean:—

I. Do all, as bearing His name. We are called Christians after Christ; it is His name that we bear. The 'name which is above every name,' the name at which every knee shall bow, that is the name we bear. How high an honour is this! How great a responsibility! We should never forget our name. We should strive to adorn it in all things, and earnestly desire never to do anything inconsistent with it. Oh, how different would our daily life be,

were but this one simple rule closely, strictly, watchfully obeyed! How many deeds would be left undone! How many words would remain unspoken!

II. Do all as being His servants. All who bear the name of Christ are by profession His servants: 'Ye serve the Lord Christ.' The man who lives to himself, seeking only to please himself, and with no regard to any higher will than his own, that man cannot be living aright. 'Ye are not your own, for ye are bought with a price.' We are the servants of Christ our Lord, and are to do His will.

But can we act on so high a principle in little things? Can we, in 'whatsoever we do in word or deed,' seek to serve Christ? Yes; whatever our Master gives us to do, be it great or small, that we are to do as His servants. If an earthly master bid his servant do the most trifling thing, the servant is doing his will as much in doing that little service as in obeying his most important commands. So it is with us, as the servants of Christ. It is not the greatness or littleness of the thing that makes the difference, but the willingness or unwillingness, the diligence or negligence, with which it

is done. If even little things be done heartily, as to the Lord, He is served in them.

III. Do all, as following His example. We have more than the commands of God; we have also the pattern of His dear Son. Jesus once lived on earth, and the history of His life is in our hands. We know how He lived, what He did, what He said, what He refrained from; we know how He acted towards friends and towards enemies; we know how He bore injustice and ill-usage; we know that He went about doing good, and that not even His bitterest enemies could find any fault in Him. He is our example. We are to aim at being like Him, in 'whatsoever we do in word or deed.' We are to do nothing which He would not have done, to say nothing which He would not have said. We are to be like Him, not merely in abstaining from evil, but also in doing good. When we meet with reproach, we are to bear it as He bore it. As we are called by His name. so we are to walk in His steps in all things.

IV. Do all, as redeemed by Him. His blood was shed for us. This must never be forgotten; this must give a tone to all our thoughts and

all our life. In this sense we must, like the apostle, always bear about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus. This is to be our motive, the constraining power over our hearts: Christ crucified for us, His blood shed on our behalf. In this faith, from this motive, by this love, we are to live and act; not only feeling them now and then as a passing thing, but having them always in us as a deep and abiding principle.

V. Do all by His grace. We cannot live to God but by His grace. We shall fail continuually unless strengthened by the Spirit of Christ. Therefore doing all in the name of Jesus must mean also doing all in His strength. He Himself, when He was going away, promised the gift of the Holy Spirit, to teach, comfort, and sanctify; nay, He said further, speaking of a presence by the Spirit, 'Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world.' We are living under these promises now. Jesus, our Master, knows our weakness and need, and is ever ready to help us. How many temptations have we from within and from without! How often do our evil hearts incline us not to follow Christ! How often do

outward temptations arise to lead us astray! Against these we have no strength of our own: all our sufficiency is of God. We must lay aside therefore all trust in ourselves, and go forward trusting in His promised grace and help. We must 'do all things in the name of the Lord Jesus,' looking unto Him as the 'author and finisher of our faith,' and feeling with the apostle, 'When I am weak, then am I strong.' Christ is all our strength; and then are we strongest, when in weakness, humility, prayer and faith, we cast ourselves most fully upon Him. His grace is sufficient for us. 'The name of the Lord is a strong tower; the righteous runneth into it, and is safe.'

There is yet one thing more in the text—thankfulness: 'Giving thanks to God and the Father by him.'

As all things are to be done in the name of the Lord Jesus, so without Him we cannot even give thanks to the Father aright. For He is our Mediator; He has opened the way of access for us; He ever liveth to make intercession for us; by Him our prayers and praises are acceptable to God.

If we really 'do all in the name of the Lord Jesus,' if we even heartily strive to do so, then it will certainly follow that we shall be of a thankful spirit; for then we shall be continually realising what we owe to His love in redemption and grace, and setting before us His example of perfect love; and thus we cannot fail to become more and more thankful in heart. To do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, and to give thanks to God the Father, are sure to go together; they form part of one character.

This thankfulness for redeeming love will lead to thankfulness for all blessings. He who has learnt to know the love of God in salvation will see the same love in all that befalls him. deed the words, 'Whatsoever ye do in word or deed,' belong to this part of the text as well as to the former. We are not merely to praise God occasionally; our hearts are to give Him thanks continually. Whatever we do, thankfulness should be the spirit in which we do it. Even should we be called to follow our Master in bearing reproach or suffering, still we must maintain a thankful spirit; 'In everything give thanks.' There can be no circumstances in which the Christian should not be thankful; for there are none which are not ordered in wisdom and love by our God and Father in Christ Jesus.

Happy they who live thus, doing all in the name of Jesus, and doing all with a thankful heart! It is not having much that can make us happy, or following no rule but our own will; but being truly grateful for all that God sends, and serving our Lord humbly and lovingly. Happy, thrice happy, they who find much of Christ in all their daily life, trusting Him, loving Him, serving Him, and following Him!

SERMON V.

THE TWO MARYS AT THE SEPULCHRE.

Marr. xxvii. 61.—'And there was Mary Magdalene, and the other Mary, sitting over against the sepulchre.'

THESE faithful women, with others besides, had stood beholding afar off while Jesus hung on the cross. The sad scene is past now. They saw Him die, then they saw Him laid in the sepulchre, and now they sit down near, unwilling still to leave the spot.

They loved Him dearly. One of them, Mary Magdalene, or Mary of Magdala, had received a great blessing from Him. She had formerly been possessed by evil spirits, and Jesus had cast them out. The other Mary was most likely 'Mary, the mother of James and Joses,' mentioned in the 56th verse of this chapter, and she is generally believed to have

been sister to the Virgin Mary, our Lord's mother. These women both loved Him. They had been much with Him, following Him from place to place, hearing what He said, and seeing what He did. They loved Him with a faithful love, and seem, with the other women, to have been bolder in showing their love in time of danger than the apostles themselves.

They sat over against the sepulchre. The stone had already been rolled to the mouth of it, so that they could no longer look on the form of Him whom they loved. But they could think of Him; and doubtless thoughts of Christ filled their hearts while they sat there. They could think of nothing else; and if they could speak at all at such a time, they could speak of nothing else.

What may we learn from their example? One plain lesson, certainly—that of a personal love to our Lord. There are many whose religion seems to consist more in holding right doctrine than in faith and love to Christ as a person. But a doctrine, however true, cannot properly be the object of either faith or love. We have faith in a person; we love a person. The object of the Christian's faith and love is Jesus Christ; not merely some doctrine or

truth about Him, but Jesus Christ Himself. In Him we are to believe, and Him we are to love. These women had such a personal love to Jesus; and in this they are our example. We are to consider Him as coming down from heaven for us, living for us, dying for us, interceding for us; and for all this we are to *love* Him as a person, a living personal Saviour.

But this personal love of these women towards Jesus was more than mere natural affection, such as is felt towards any dear companion, friend or benefactor. They had at least some measure of faith; they loved Him as their Redeemer and Lord. It was not without effect that they had heard so many gracious words, and seen so many wonderful works. They were believers, though not yet perhaps believing with a clear and undoubting faith. Whatever was their measure of belief in His promised resurrection, whether hope or fear prevailed while they sat sorrowing over against the sepulchre, or even if for the time grief swallowed up every other feeling, still they were not mere mourners for a lost friend, they were also believers in a beloved Saviour.

We have further light than they had. We know the whole history, not only of His death,

but also of His resurrection and ascension. And we have learnt most clearly from the word of God why He came, and the great work which He did. While therefore we feel a personal love to Jesus, we must look to it that our love be not a common love, a mere personal affection towards Him as good and kind, but that it be love to Him as the blessed Son of God, who redeemed us by His blood. 'Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.' This is what Jesus did for us, and this is the true foundation for our love. Our faith must work by love, our love must spring from our faith.

Though the faith of these women was but an imperfect faith, and they were not yet far advanced in light, and knowledge, and in the spiritual life, nevertheless they loved Jesus, and loved Him dearly. What does this teach us? That love to Christ is not, as some seem to suppose, a feeling which none but advanced Christians can hope to have, but rather one which every true believer has, however young in the faith. No sooner does the heart lay hold by faith on Christ's redemption, than love to the Redeemer is kindled. We cannot truly believe in Him without loving Him.

Our knowledge may be far from clear, and our faith may be weak, yet if it be real, it is not so weak as to produce no love. 'We love Him because He first loved us.' This is equally true of the Father, who sent His Son into the world, and of the Son Himself who came and died for us. When once we believe with the heart that Jesus loved us and gave Himself for us, and thus begin to have a hope in Him, then too we begin to love Him. 'Faith, which worketh by love,' must always, in every stage, be the description of true faith. It shows itself first in love to God in Christ, and then in love to all for His sake.

It was in deep sadness of heart that these women sat over against the tomb of Jesus; warm and true as it was, their love was a sorrowful love. Our love need not be sorrowful: we need not, as it were, sit by the grave of our Lord, and mourn over a lost Saviour. Rather, we may look up in faith to where He is now in His glory, and rejoice in His finished work, and be cheered by His gracious mediation and intercession. The grave could not hold Him. As He died for us, so He rose for us. And now He is ever at the right hand of God for us. There are indeed sad thoughts for us about

our Lord. Well may we be sad when our minds dwell on all that He suffered for us: still more when we think of our own past sins; and most of all when, through our weakness and corruption, we still go astray. But the thought of Christ our Lord, as He is now, is the very thought that will best comfort us in sadness. The faithful women looked at His sepulchre, and were sad: we may look up in faith to His glorious abode, and be full of joy. Even their sadness was not to last long; soon were they to hear the joyful news, 'He is not here, for he is risen.' This is the glad tidings that comes to us too. He is not in the grave, He is in heaven. There He cares for us, and pleads for us. There He is, as our Friend and Advocate, until the happy day when He will come to take us to Himself We have not lost Him; He is our living Saviour. now He is with us by the Spirit; and hereafter His own words will be fulfilled, 'Father, I will that they also whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am; that they may behold my glory which thou hast given me.'

SERMON VI.

THE FRUITS OF THE FALL.

GEN. iii. 28.—'Therefore the Lord God sent him forth from the garden of Eden, to till the ground from whence he was taken.'

When we look into the Bible, we see the reason of many of the strange and perplexing things which are around us.

For instance, we find ourselves living in a world of labour. Why is labour necessary? Why does not the ground of itself bring forth food for man? Why must man work, and work hard, if he would live? We have the answer in the Bible. Things were not always as they are now. A great change once took place; and the history of it is given in this chapter.

Before the fall Adam and Eve lived together in the garden of Eden, happy in the favour and presence of God. They had no guilt to make them afraid of Him; no pain, no sorrow, no death. They had everything to make them happy. The earth brought forth freely all that they wanted, they had no painful toil, all their labour was easy and pleasant. We read that 'the Lord 'God took the man, and put him into the garden of Eden, to dress it and to keep it.' Thus their time was passed in peaceful and innocent work and pleasure.

But they listened to the voice of the tempter, and broke God's command, and from that moment all was changed. They must be there no longer. They must leave that happy place, and go forth into the wide world, and there work for their bread. The very ground was pronounced cursed for their sake. Thenceforth it would want hard and constant labour to make it produce food for man. 'In sorrow shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life; thorns also and thistles shall it bring forth to thee; and thou shalt eat the herb of the field; in the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return to the ground; for out of it wast thou ken: for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt u return.'

So it has been ever since with all the race of

Adam for nearly six thousand years; and so it is still. The ground must be tilled. Man's constant labour is required. In the sweat of his face must he eat bread. Season after season he must plough, and sow, and weed, and reap; rising up early and late taking rest. If labour should cease, food would fail. He must look for nothing without toil.

Thus we see from the Bible how it is that this world is a world of labour, why work is the general lot of man, why the child of the labouring man must work as soon as he is able to earn anything, why generation after generation is born to labour still. Our first parent fell; and God made this to be his lot, and the lot of his children after him.

It is true that labour in a certain degree is not painful but pleasant, not hurtful but healthful. There are some also who, in the providence of God, are not forced to live by bodily labour. Yet not the less true is it that labour is among the fruits of the fall; not healthful exertion of body or mind, but weary and wearing toil, with cares, and anxieties, and troubles, that were unknown in the golden days of the world, ere sin had entered.

Nor was labour the worst part of the conse-

quences of the fall. See the change that took place in Adam and Eve themselves. They used to love God's presence, now they shrink from it. Never till now had He to ask, 'Where art thou?' Never till now had His voice been heard without delight. But now see them hiding from His presence, and trembling at His call. Why do they fear? Because they have sinned. Oh, what a change did sin make! To leave the garden of Eden and labour for their bread was but a change in their condition; but this was a change in themselves. Sin had entered into the world. Our first parents were now sinners. And all who have come after them have been so too, save He who took our nature upon Him to save sinners. Fallen man does not love God or His presence. Guilt has estranged him from God. Till renewed by grace, he is far off from God in heart. Ever since the fall, sin has been in the world. Hence come, not only estrangement of heart from God, but also the thousand ills that man does to man. Hence come crime, misery, war, oppression, cruelty. All date from that sad day when Adam and Eve fell from God.

Then death also came. 'Sin entered into the world, and death by sin.' The sentence went forth, 'Dust thou art, and unto dust thou shalt return. Adam went forth to labour awhile, and then to die. From the moment that the sentence was pronounced, he and all his seed became subject to death. There was death indeed in the world before man sinned, but man was not subject to it till then.

The sentence is still in force. We are born into the world; we live here for a few years; we toil, we suffer, we sin; we have our joys and sorrows, our hopes and fears, our changes, sicknesses, losses; and then we die. This is our appointed lot, as children of Adam. Dust we are, and unto dust do we return.

And is this all? All that a Christian has, all that he may hope for? This short, sad, sinful, toilsome course—is this the Christian's all? Oh, no. Hardly had man fallen, when a hope of restoration was given him, and a Deliverer was promised. Again and again, as generation after generation lived and died, the promise was repeated, with more and more of clearness and fulness. At length, in God's good time, the Deliverer came. The Son of God Himself was born into the world, and lived, and died, and rose again. He is called the second Adam. But He is far greater than

the first Adam. He came to restore fallen man to favour and peace. He did so by His death upon the cross. He made an atonement for sin, and overcame death, and fulfilled the law of God. And all for us; to save and restore a ruined race.

Now, in Jesus, there is life for the believer: life, pardon, peace, rest, salvation. True, his outward lot on earth is not changed. Still he must labour; still is he subject to sickness and sorrow; sin cleaves to him still; and still he must die. But his hardest labour is cheered by the love of God; in sickness and sorrow that love is his comfort; if he fall into sin, he may have recourse to the blood of sprinkling; and for him death itself has lost its sting. He must labour, yet not without ceasing. From the very first, God in mercy appointed one day in seven as a day of rest; and the Lord's day is the Christian's happiest day; happy in itself, and happy as a pledge and foretaste of that rest which remaineth for the people of God.

There is such a rest. God has promised it to every believer. Let him live in the hope of it. Let that blessed hope sweeten all toil and cheer all sorrow. In that better Eden no serpent can beguile, and there no sin can come. There

man will love God with a perfect love, and find in His presence fulness of joy. Never again will he tremble at His voice, never will he fall again, never will he be called to leave that happy place. Already the believer has some foretaste of that heavenly rest, but it is the hope of heaven itself that forms his chief joy below.

Oh, make sure of a present portion in Christ. You were born of Adam's race, a fallen creature; look to it that you have a part in the second Adam. Sin, death, and ruin came by Adam, life and salvation by Jesus Christ. He is made known to you in the Gospel. A full salvation is freely offered to you in Him. Eternal life is promised to all that believe in Christ. And spiritual life, the earnest of life eternal, is promised to all who seek the gift of the Holy Spirit. 'Ask, and ye shall receive.'

SERMON VII.

THE PERFECT PATTERN.

Eph. v. 1.— Be ye therefore followers of God, as dear children.

WHEN parents are such as Christian parents ought to be, their children should look to them as their example; and nothing on earth can be happier than a household in which the parents are walking in the ways of God, and their children following in their steps. Alas, how often is it otherwise!

Believers form one great family, of which God is the Father; they are the household of God. What has been said about earthly families applies to this great family. All the children of God should follow Him as their pattern. This indeed is the exact meaning of the text, for the words, 'Be ye therefore

followers of God, as dear children,' might stand thus, 'Be ye therefore imitators of God, as His dear children.' As His children, His dear children, copy the example of your heavenly Father, imitate Him in all your conduct.

What a wonderful rule is this! How high a standard does it set up! We say sometimes of a very good man, 'He is quite a pattern;' and Paul said more than once, 'Be ye followers [or imitators] of me.' But here we have a far higher example set before us—not that of a good man, not that of an apostle, but that of God Himself. 'Be imitators of God.' He is to be our pattern. Paul himself would have others follow him, only so far as he followed this pattern: 'Be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ.'

But how can God be an example to man? How can we poor creatures, in our little concerns and in our earthly and human duties, take pattern from God in heaven?

In the first place, God has revealed Himself to us in His word. There He has not only commanded us what to do, but has told us much of His own Divine nature. He has set Himself forth to us as perfect in holiness and goodness, and has shown Himself such in all the record of His dealings; and He has said, 'Be ye holy, for I am holy.'

But, not to dwell upon this, there is a clearer and more definite way in which we may take God for our example. The Son of God became man, and lived upon this earth. If there be a difficulty in seeing how God in heaven can be a pattern to us, the difficulty is removed when we think of the Son of God upon earth. He lived in our world: He had the same nature. the same feelings, the same everything with us. except sin. The evil that is on all sides of us was around Him too. The difficulties, the trials, the sorrows, that we meet with, He met with too, and many more. We can therefore take Him as our pattern. We may fall far short, as we certainly shall; yet it may be our aim to be like Him. We must have some aim, some pattern, some standard: Jesus is to be this to us. We are to be imitators of Him. of God manifest in the flesh.

That this is the main sense in which we are to take the words, seems plain from what immediately follows: 'Be ye therefore followers of God, as dear children; and walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us.' Here one particular

point is mentioned, in which we are to follow Christ. He loved us, and gave Himself for us; and we, following His example, are to walk in love one towards another. In this way we are to be followers of God, as His dear children.

Let us pause here for a moment. In a happy Christian family, where the children are walking in the steps of their parents, one main feature is mutual love. If that be wanting, the whole tone of the household, as a Christian household, is lost. Whatever else of good there may be, the want of love mars all. So it is in the family of God. All His children should be imitators of His love; and their love to Him, and to one another for His sake, should bind them all together. Love is the very badge of God's servants, the special mark of His children. 'By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another.'

But we are to follow Christ, not only in this, but in all things. All that we see in Him we are to copy; all that we see to be opposed to His example we are to shun. Observe the list of sins that follow the text: 'But fornication, and all uncleanness, or covetousness, let it not

be once named amongst you, as becometh saints; neither filthiness, nor foolish talking, nor jesting, which are not convenient; but rather giving of thanks. For this ye know, that no whoremonger, nor unclean person, nor covetous man, who is an idolater, hath any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God.' There was nothing of all this in Christ, there must be nothing of it in us. Look at His life, then look at this list of sins. Could there be a greater contrast? The greater the difference, the more are we bound to shun such things, for HE is our pattern. 'Saints' are they who are His by faith, and who are striving to follow Him; they must consider whose they are and whom they serve, and seek earnestly to live as becomes their profession. The children of God are also heirs of God; they must, as children, put away all that would shut them out from being heirs. They are heirs by being joint heirs with Christ; their whole title rests on Him; they must seek to be like Him.

I think I hear some one say, 'This is going too far; no one can be so good as this; all have their faults, and must have.' But what is your wish? what is your aim? If you

thought you could do so, would you then try to imitate God? Alas! I fear not. One who speaks thus is not one who hungers and thirsts after righteousness. He who does not desire a perfect holiness does not really desire holiness at all. There is no hatred of sin in such a heart. What do you in fact say, when you speak thus? You declare that you will not follow the example that is set before you in No: you will be content with the Bible. another pattern. You will be guided by your own opinion, by reason, by what is usual. You will copy man, not God. Thus you set yourself directly against God's Word, which says, 'Be ve therefore followers of God.'

Let me not be mistaken. Let none suppose that we can follow God perfectly, or save ourselves by our own doings. Thank God, our hopes rest on a surer foundation. But he who aims highest will reach highest; we must take no other standard than that which God has appointed; and that man cannot have gained a saving interest in Christ, who does not desire to be made like Him in all things.

This text is, in fact, not about the way of salvation, but about the fruits of faith. Christians, it speaks mainly to you. It is no hard

service (and you know it) to which you are called. You are addressed as 'dear children'beloved children of God. He loves you, and you love Him, and wish to love Him more. He has taken you into His family. He has made you His children by adoption and grace. It is a happy life to which He calls you—this holy, devoted, Christ-following life. I spoke before of the happiness of a Christian household; but how happy is the great, universal family of God! Some are gone already to the heavenly home, some are still here below; but they are all one, one in Christ, one in the Father. They who are gone are happy, but they who are left are happy too. For they have betaken themselves to Jesus as their Saviour, and they know He will never let them perish. Their feet are upon the rock, they have cast aside all self-righteous hopes, and their hope is built on Christ alone. It is a sure hope, a blessed hope, a hope that makes them happy. They love their Saviour, they love their Father. Their service is a service of love. They are children imitating their Father, because they love Him, and because they love holiness. They do not complain of the rule, 'Be ve followers of God.' As His

Man himself passes away, and that more quickly than many of his works. Where are the men who used to attack and defend that ancient castle? Where are the former dwellers in that old house? Where are the worshippers who, generation after generation, knelt in that venerable church? They are all passed away. The buildings remain, but the men are gone.

Even the works of God are passing away: 'Heaven and earth shall pass away,'—that is, the earth and the sky. The earth, on which man has trodden ever since he was formed,—'the everlasting hills,' which have looked down on so many changes, and yet have remained unchanged themselves,—the sky, to which the eyes of man have been lifted ever since he was placed on the earth,—even these, which seem so lasting, are passing away.* So greatly is this earth to be changed, that it is said to pass away, and to become a new earth.

If man and man's works, if even the outward works of God, if all the things which we look upon, are thus to pass away, is there anything which is not to pass away?

Yes; the Lord Jesus Christ said, 'Heaven and earth shall pass away; but my words shall * Bev. xxi. 1.

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'dear children,' they delight in it. Whatever they may once have been to them, His commandments are not now grievous to them. It is their hearts' desire to serve Him, and please Him, and be like Him.

Oh, may God by His grace bring many a wanderer into this happy path! And may He make us all to live more in this spirit, walking as His dear children, loving Him, following Him, imitating Him.

SERMON VIII.

TO-MORROW.

MATT. vi. 34.—'Take therefore no thought for the morrow: for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof.'

HALF our pains and pleasures are drawn from the future. We are pleased with a thing, not only when we have it, but while we are looking forward to it; and the apprehension of evil is often more painful than the evil itself. Made as we are with hopes and fears, we cannot but look forward.

But too often we look forward anxiously. It is against this that our Lord here warns us,—the habit of anxiously looking forward to the future.

'Take no thought for the morrow,' He says. He does not mean that we are to be careless about the future, making no provision for it, and exercising no forethought about it. But He means that we are not to be anxious about it, that we are not to pass our days in a state of apprehension as to what is to come. 'The morrow' takes in the whole of the future; but the use of this word sets the lesson before us in a striking way. We are not to be anxious about the future at all; not even about that part of it which is close at hand, the very next day; 'Take no thought for the morrow.'

How comforting to be told this by our Lord Himself! Then certainly we need not be anxious, and ought not to be, for He Himself forbids it. If we give way to apprehension, we are doing what He bids us not to do. If we strive against anxious thoughts, then we are but following His direction. Thus, what is right, and what is happy, go together.

'For the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself.' What does our Lord mean by this? Plainly, that He who provides for to-day will provide for to-morrow also. 'Your heavenly Father,' He says before, 'knoweth that ye have need of all these things.' He knows this, not only with regard to to-day, but with regard to to-morrow also. When to-

morrow comes, the eye that is over us to-day will be over us still; and still the same love and care will be with us. In ceasing to be anxious about the morrow, we are leaving it not to chance, but to God. We thus acknowledge Him as the God of to-morrow, as well as of to-day, and take things in the order which He has marked out. Step by step, day by day, is God's rule for us. We are to live in continual dependence on Him, again and again seeking blessings from His hand, and coming to Him continually as fresh wants arise.

The very title of 'Father' seems to convey this meaning. The child of an earthly family does not seek to lay up a private store for to-morrow, but is content to trust its parent's care. The father may be poor, and may find difficulty in providing daily bread for his children; but in general a little child knows little of that, but looks every day for food and all necessary things, not doubting that its parent both can and will supply them. And thus would our heavenly Father have us to live day by day in simple trust in Him. There are no difficulties with the Lord of heaven and earth; His power is as great as His will. If the child of an earthly parent is not anxious,

surely the child of God should not be so. In the prayer that He Himself gave us, our Lord taught us what to seek and how to feel: 'Give us this day our daily bread, give us day by day our daily bread.' He bids us ask, not for to-morrow's bread, but for to-day's. When to-morrow comes, then we may ask afresh. So we should pray, so trust, and so live.

'Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof.' Evil means here, not sin, but any trouble, or want, or cause for anxiety. Such evil there is, and such there will be. But it comes day by day, not all at once. Each day's want, each day's provision, each day's blessing, comes by itself. The evil of each day is 'sufficient,' enough. We could not bear the evil or trouble of our life, if it came all together. Then it would be more than sufficient. But this is not how God sends it. Let us look back on past troubles. How did they come? Not all at once, but one by one, with intervals of time and of rest. Coming even so, they tried us greatly; but they would have overwhelmed us, had they come all together. But anxiety about the future makes them come all together, heaps to-morrow's care upon to-day's, and thus makes the evil of to-day more than sufficient, because more than what God makes it. God sends each day such troubles, difficulties, and cares, as He sees fit; and promises withal daily food, daily strength, daily help and comfort. We must not outrun His promises by our anxiety.

Besides, trouble or evil comes to us for good. It is not really evil, if taken aright—taken as God sends it. For then it is a fatherly chastisement, a loving discipline, part of our Father's wise and gracious training of us for His kingdom. But this benefit is likely to be lost, if we do not take trouble as God sends it, in His order and in His measure. To-day's trouble is what is to do us good. If we add to-morrow's to it before to-morrow comes, the good may be lost; for then we take it in our own measure and order, rather than in God's.

I have spoken of this exhortation as conveying comfort and blessing, and as showing that duty and happiness are linked together. It is indeed a blessing, to be told by our Lord Himself not to be anxious about the future. But in order to take this comfort to ourselves, we must know God as our Father, our reconciled and loving Father in Christ Jesus. Just before the text, our Lord says: 'Seek ye first

the kingdom of God, and His righteousness;' and a few verses before, 'Ye cannot serve God and Mammon.' We must choose God before all, we must first seek His kingdom and righteousness—we must go to Jesus as our Saviour, seek pardon and peace through His precious blood, and become children of God by adoption and grace. Then, and then only, we shall find such words as those of the text to be precious to us.

Yes, precious indeed! For they give us a right to put away anxiety. 'Your Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things.' Why should any be anxious, to whom such words as these apply? 'Your Father knoweth.' Let that be enough for the child of God. What you want to-day, and what you will want to-morrow—all your wants, for body and for soul—just what is best for you—'your Father knoweth.' And who is your Father? The great God Almighty, the Lord of heaven and earth. Away with anxiety then! Away with doubts and fears about to-morrow's troubles, or to-morrow's wants! 'Your Father knoweth:' let that be enough.

But what can they do who know not God as their Father, when anxious thoughts arise?

When 'evil' comes—trouble, loss, want, sorrow, apprehension-what peace can then be theirs? Ah! you have not yet cast upon your Saviour the burden of your sins, how can you take to Him any other burden? You have not yet gone to Him for the supply of your greatest need, how shall you flee to Him for relief when lesser wants press upon you? When will you learn where true safety and happiness are to be found? Not in the vain attempt to serve two masters; not in seeking the world first, and God second; but only in the full surrender of your heart to God in Christ. None but the child of God is really happy. None but the child of God is even safe. None but the child of God can truly lay aside anxiety about the future, and live day by day trustful, peaceful, and happy.

SERMON IX.

THE REPENTANCE OF JUDAS.

MATT. xxvii. 3-5.—'Then Judas, which had betrayed him, when he saw that he was condemned, repented himself, and brought again the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and elders, saying, I have sinned in that I have betrayed the innocent blood. And they said, What is that to us? see thou to that. And he cast down the pieces of silver in the temple, and departed, and went and hanged himself.'

We read of two kinds of sorrow for sin; 'godly sorrow,' and 'the sorrow of the world.' And 'godly sorrow,' we are told, 'worketh repentance to salvation, not to be repented of; but the sorrow of the world worketh death.'* Now it is said here that Judas 'repented himself;' but it is plain that his repentance was not 'repentance unto salvation' (indeed the word

in the original is quite different), but only 'the sorrow of the world.' It was sorrow, not so much for sin as for the consequences of sin; for it was not till he saw that Jesus was condemned that he repented himself. And it worked death in his case. A bitter remorse took hold of him. An insupportable load pressed upon his mind. Yet this did not lead him to God, but rather drove him to destruction; for his heart was still unchanged. 'He departed and went and hanged himself.'

An unchanged heart often feels remorse, but never godly sorrow. A great crime weighing on the conscience has often clouded all the after-life of the criminal, and has sometimes driven him to give himself up to justice. And many have passed a sad old age by reason of youth wasted, the best years of life mis-spent, opportunities gone for ever, and perhaps the consequences of sin still felt in ruined health and blighted prospects. All this may be, and yet no godly sorrow, no true repentance, because no change of heart.

True repentance is the gift of God, and comes only when the heart is changed by grace. Then is there a true sorrow for sin itself. Then the sinner comes to Christ Then does he draw nigh to God. With trembling step perhaps and downcast look, like the publican in the temple; yet still he draws nigh. For godly sorrow leads to God, while the sorrow of the world does but drive the heart from Him.

If repentance be the gift of God, then we may pray for it. Jesus Christ is exalted 'to be a Prince and a Saviour, for to give repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins;'* true repentance, a change of heart. We may seek this precious gift therefore from Him. How earnestly should we seek it! Some say, 'I cannot go to Jesus till I repent.' Nay rather, you cannot repent till you go to Jesus. If repentance be His to give, how can we have it but by going to Him for it?

Now observe how little help this miserable man got from his companions in sin. They proved but false friends in the hour of need. But a little while ago, Judas and the chief priests and elders were plotting together with one object. Their motives indeed were different; his, mere gain; theirs, the destruction of Jesus. But they were joining together for one end, they were partners and associates, and one might have thought them friends. A

^{*} Acts, v. 31.

few hours only have passed, and see them now. In his deep remorse and despair, Judas comes to the chief priests and elders. 'I have sinned,' says he, 'in that I have betrayed the innocent blood.' How did his partners receive him? They have no word of pity for him in his misery—no help, no comfort, no sympathy. Though every tone and look must have spoken the anguish of his heart, he meets with nothing but hard-hearted indifference and mocking scorn. 'What is that to us?' You have done our work, and we have paid the price; the business is finished; your sorrow, and His innocence, what matter they? 'What is that to us?' See thou to that.'

Ah! there is nothing sure in a friendship or companionship based on sinful, or even on mere worldly principles.

How often in trials at law do we read of companions in crime betraying one another! Sometimes it is in order to save themselves, but quite as often from the hope of reward.

How often do old companions, friends as they called themselves, fail in the hour of need! They seemed firm friends indeed. They were boon companions perhaps. They laughed, they sang, they drank. Many a merry evening did

they pass together. But let one of their number be brought into trouble, and how often do such friends as these quite forsake him! A fever seizes him, some contagious fever, and they flee from his house, as from the plague. he comes to poverty and want; he can no longer feast them; he stands in need of the very necessaries of life; often in such a case he seeks help in vain from these old friends. not the prodigal find it so? Though there was a mighty famine in the land, yet all were not brought to destitution, for we know that there was one citizen of that country who still kept his property; and if one, there were probably more. Yet 'no man gave unto him.' Of all those with whom he had wasted his substance with riotous living, there was not one to help him in his need.

How different is true Christian friendship! It is based on the love of God. It is kind, generous, unselfish. It leads men to regard one another as brethren, brethren in the Lord. Even where this bond is wanting on one side, the Christian is kind and loving to all. Often, when one who has kept company with the worldly and ungodly, and shunned and even scoffed at the servants of God, is

brought into some sore trouble, he finds out at last who are his true friends. While old companions come not near him, he finds at his bedside some kind Christian person, whom once perhaps he disliked and despised, and hears from his lips the words of truth and of prayer, and receives from his hand such comforts as the sick man needs.

Seek such friends. Be such friends. We should all be fellow-helpers, helping each other with kindness, with comfort, with sympathy, with gifts. We should be companions—never in sin or in folly; at times, it may be, in tribulation; but always in godliness; fellow-travellers towards the heavenly city, cheering one another by the way.

SERMON X.

THE KING WHO CAME TO HIS OWN AND WAS NOT RECEIVED.

John, i. 11.—'He came unto his own, and his own received him not.'

When some great man, the owner of property in various parts of the country, pays a visit to a distant estate, he is usually received with great honour. The tenantry turn out to meet him, every cottager puts on his best, all try to show respect to their landlord. This is because he comes to his own.

If a king visit a distant part of his dominions, still more earnestly do his subjects seek to do him honour. Great preparations are made to receive him, and the day of his arrival is a day of general rejoicing. This again is because he comes to his own.

But there was once a King, who came to His own, and was not received in this way. Yet He was the greatest and best of kings, and not only so, but He came in a most remarkable manner, and with the kindest intentions. left the glorious part of His kingdom, where He lived and reigned, and came to a poor and low part, the people of which had rebelled against Him. But He did not come to punish them; He came with purposes of mercy; His object was to do them good, to save them from punishment, and to make them happy. He came, not in state, but in a poor and humble way. In fact He came as one of them. He lived among them, and went about among them doing good. If any of them had any complaint to make, He would hear it; if any came to Him for relief, He never turned them away. He was always kind and gracious, and did nothing but good wherever He went. Yet, strange to say, most of the people would not receive Him. Very few would even acknowledge that He was their King; the greater part rejected Him, hated, opposed, and insulted Him; and at length they killed Him.

I need hardly explain whom I mean. There has been but one such case ever since the

world began. Jesus Christ was the King, this world was the kingdom He came to visit, and unbelieving men were they who would not receive Him.

As in the cases before supposed, so here, the great point is that He came to His own. 'All things were made by Him, and without Him was not anything made that was made.' 'He was in the world, and the world was made by Him, and the world knew Him not.' The world to which He came was His by a right such as no earthly king ever had,—the right of creation. 'By Him all things were made,' the world and all things in it. Ages before the men then living were born, the world was made by Him out of nothing; and yet, when He thus came to 'His own,' 'His own received Him not.'

That man should not have received Him is the more remarkable, because the lower part of creation did receive and obey Him. The stormy winds ceased at His command, and the waters were calmed by His word; He had but to speak, and diseases fled, and evil spirits went out of those possessed. Nature owned Him, but man refused Him. Man, the highest work of creation; man, who could think, believe, and

know; man alone would not receive the Son of God.

Yet man, like the rest, was His own, and by the same right—the right of creation. When all else had been made, then 'God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness,' and man was made accordingly. 'The Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and man became a living soul.' Every part and faculty of man is from God; powers of body and powers of mind; thought, and sense, and feeling. God made man, and God sustains man: 'in Him we live, and move, and have our being;' yet when the Son of God came, and came to save, man received Him not.

When we take this general view of the text, we are struck with man's conduct. It was so strange, so ungrateful, so unlike what generally takes place even between man and man. It is only from the Bible that we learn the explanation. The truth is, that man is fallen. His heart is naturally estranged from God; and that very sin, which made it needful that a Saviour should come, kept man from receiving Him when He came; and so it has been ever since, and so it is now. Most men will not re-

ceive Christ, few only do receive Him. The words are still sadly true, 'He came unto His own, and His own received Him not.'

How is it with us? We are His, by right of creation at least, for He made us. And He has come to us. For we are among those rebellious subjects whom He came to save; and He has caused us to hear of His coming and dying for sinners; and still He comes to us continually, freely offering us pardon and life, and seeking admittance into our hearts. Have we received Him?

Let none think this question out of place with those who call themselves Christians. Alas! among those who bear His name there are numbers who have not given Him their hearts. But nothing short of this is really receiving Him: it must be heart-receiving, or it is no received. He came to save, and He must be received as a Saviour, or He is not received at all.

They therefore who do not believe in Jesus with the heart do in fact reject Him; He comes to them, but they receive Him not. In what state then are they left? They are still His by right of creation, and subject to His authority and power; but they refuse to

submit to Him. They are left therefore in a state no better than that in which they were when He came to visit them; they are still rebellious subjects. Their state is no better; rather it is far worse. For now they have despised the Son of God, slighted His offers, refused His mercy. How will they be dealt with when He comes again?

But some do receive Him. Even of those to whom He came first, some received Him, though but few. And so it is still. most reject Him, yet some receive Him. What of them? They were His before, by right of creation; but now they are His by a new and dearer right, His by redemption, His by adoption and grace. 'As many as receive Him, to them gave He power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on His name.' They are now at peace with God, and admitted into His family. God is their reconciled Father in Christ Jesus. He loves them, and treats them as His children, and they love Him as their Father. Blessings unnumbered are theirs—life, pardon, peace and salvation; a God ever near, a Saviour trusted and loved, the promised grace of the Spirit. And, beside all this, they know that there is prepared for them

a blessed home, where they will be for ever with the Lord.

This is what is given now to all believers. In the daily enjoyment of this thousands of happy Christians are now living. This is what is still offered to all, even to those who have long rejected Christ, if they will now at length submit themselves to Him, and receive Him as their Saviour and their King.

SERMON XI.

THE RETURN OF THE SPIES.

Num. xiii. 25.—'And they returned from searching the land after forty days.'

God had promised to bring the children of Israel into a land 'flowing with milk and honey,' that is, a rich and fruitful country, where all their wants should be fully supplied. After a toilsome journey through the wilderness they had now reached the borders of Canaan; and Moses, by command of God, sent out men to search the land. Twelve men were sent, a man from every tribe, and their orders were to 'see the land, what it is; and the people that dwelleth therein, whether they be strong or weak, few or many; and what the land is that they dwell in, whether it be good or bad; and what cities they be that they

dwell in, whether in tents or in strongholds; and what the land is, whether it be fat or lean; whether there be wood therein or not;' and Moses added this charge, 'And be ye of good courage, and bring of the fruit of the land.'

The spies did as they were commanded, and searched the land as far as Hebron. In the course of their search they came to one place of remarkable fruitfulness, the brook or valley of Eshcol. So rich were its fruits, that they cut there 'a branch with one cluster of grapes, and they bare it between two upon a staff; and they brought of the pomegranates and of the figs.' Thus laden, they returned to Moses and the congregation.

They could not but speak well of a land so fertile. 'We came,' said they, 'unto the land whither thou sentest us, and surely it floweth with milk and honey; and this is the fruit of it.' So far all was encouraging. But when they went on to describe the inhabitants and their cities, their tone was changed. 'Nevertheless,' they said, 'the people be strong that dwell in the land, and the cities are walled and very great; and moreover, we saw the children of Anak there.' And when Caleb, one of their number, and Joshua with him, tried to

cheer the people, saying, 'Let us go up at once and possess it, for we are well able to overcome it,' the rest of the spies still spoke in the most discouraging way. 'We be not able,' said they, 'to go up against the people; for they be stronger than we.' Thus 'they brought up an evil report of the land which they had searched unto the children of Israel, saying, The land through which we have gone to search it is a land that eateth up the inhabitants thereof;' meaning perhaps, that it seemed an unhealthy country, or that wars were frequent in it, for that it was a land of plenty they could not deny. 'And all the people,' they continued, 'that we saw in it, are men of a great stature. And there we saw the giants; and we were in our own sight as grasshoppers, and so we were in their sight.'

The people were filled with fear by this report. 'All the congregation lifted up their voice and cried; and the people wept that night.' They went further, and 'murmured against Moses and against Aaron.' 'Would God that we had died in the land of Egypt! or would God we had died in this wilderness!' And, despising God's commands to them by Moses, and disregarding His promises, 'they

said one to another, Let us make a captain, and let us return into Egypt.'

It would be too long to enter at large into what followed. It is enough to say that, in consequence of this unbelief and disobedience, the spies who brought the evil report were at once visited with death, and all those of that generation who were grown up to manhood were condemned to wander in the wilderness till they died, and never to enter the land of Canaan. Though they were on the very borders of the land when this happened, it was not till forty years afterwards that they, or rather their children, entered it. All, except Caleb and Joshua, the faithful two, died in the wilderness.

What do we learn from this history? A solemn lesson against unbelief. It is in this way that the Apostle applies it, in his epistle to the Hebrews. He first quotes the 95th Psalm: 'Wherefore, as the Holy Ghost saith, To-day if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts, as in the provocation, in the day of temptation in the wilderness; when your fathers tempted me, proved me, and saw my works forty years. Wherefore I was grieved with that generation, and said, They do always err

in their heart; and they have not known my ways. So I sware in my wrath, they shall not enter into my rest.' Then from this example He gives a warning against unbelief: 'Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God;' and goes on afterwards to apply the psalm yet more closely: 'While it is said, To-day if ye will hear His voice, harden not your hearts as in the provocation. For some, when they had heard, did provoke: howbeit not all that came out of Egypt by Moses. But with whom was He grieved forty years? Was it not with those that had sinned, whose carcases fell in the wilderness? And to whom sware He that they should not enter into His rest, but to them that believed not?' And lastly He brings all to this conclusion: 'So we see that they could not enter in because of unbelief;' and thus applies the whole subject, 'Let us therefore fear lest a promise being left us of entering into his rest, any of you should seem to come short of it.'

Yes, we too have a promised rest, a good land, the heavenly Canaan. God, who promised to the Israelites, after their journey through the wilderness, 'a land flowing with

milk and honey,' has promised to all who seek it through Jesus Christ, rest and glory with Him in heaven, when they shall have passed through the wilderness of this world. Just as the land of Canaan, fruitful and delightful, lay before the Israelites when the spies were sent out, so is the heavenly Canaan prepared for the spiritual Israel, for all true believers. God gave Canaan to Israel; they were expressly warned against saying, 'My power and the might of mine hand hath gotten me this wealth.' Heaven likewise is a gift, God's free gift for Christ's sake. 'The gift of God is eternal life, through Jesus Christ our Lord.'

Yet numbers fall short of it; for when the Apostle warns against seeming to come short, He means really coming short. As almost a whole generation of Israel, though the promise was made to them, and the land lay before them, yet never entered it, so thousands to whom the offers of the Gospel come, fail to enter into the rest of God.

Why? For the very same reason as kept the Israelites out of Canaan—unbelief. They cannot enter in 'because of unbelief.'

Let us look into this more closely.

The unbelief of the Israelites consisted in

this: not that they did not believe in the goodness of the land, for the grapes of Eshcol convinced them of that, but that they did not believe that they could get possession of the land. The strong and warlike inhabitants, with their fortified towns, filled them with alarm. They forgot the promises of God. He had said that He would give them the land. If they had trusted in Him, not all the power of the Canaanites would have been able to resist them. The land was theirs by the promise of God. But their faith failed, and so they could not enter in.

The unbelief of those who do not embrace the Gospel is of the like nature. They do not deny that heaven is a place to be desired, though no unrenewed heart has really a longing after it for its own sake. Almost all however do profess a wish to go to heaven when they die. But they see and feel hindrances and difficulties of various kinds.

Some do not believe in salvation as the gift of God for Christ's sake, purchased by His precious blood, and freely bestowed. They are not careless, but they are self-righteous, thinking that there must be some worthiness in them, and not willing to owe all to grace, and to trust

Christ fully. No wonder that they find no comfort. No wonder that heaven seems beyond their reach. Christ is the way, the *qnly* way. No man cometh unto the Father but by Him. Such cannot enter in because of their unbelief.

Others begin well. They believe the word of God, and seem to embrace the Gospel, and to enter upon the heavenly road. They even, like the spies, pluck some of the fruits of Canaan, and in their own experience learn somewhat of the blessings of true religion. But they are easily hindered. The first difficulty frightens them. The trials, opposition, reproach, and self-denial of the Christian course discourage them. They do not rely on the unfailing word of God. They do not feel that His grace is sufficient for them. Thus, though they have put their hand to the plough, they look back; and they too cannot enter in because of unbelief.

The persons already mentioned are, in their unbelief, like both the spies and the people in this history. But some are more especially like the *people*, who listened to the spies rather than to God, speaking as He did by Moses, and also by Caleb and Joshua. Such are those who

are led by worldly advisers to give up serious religion and to follow the ways of those around them, instead of taking up the cross and following Christ. They are not ignorant of the word of God; and perhaps they have been under faithful preaching, and have even felt somewhat of the power of the truth. But they suffer the word of man to influence them rather than the word of God, and let this 'evil report' outweigh what God has said. Thus they also are hindered by unbelief.

Again there are some whose case is more like that of the spies themselves, who not only feared, but led others to fear. How awful a thing it is, to be the means of turning any back from following God! How heavy a weight of guilt must rest on those who hinder others from believing! A backslider, a worldly friend, or even a faint-hearted or inconsistent Christian, may do harm of which he little thinks. A beginner in the Christian course is easily influenced. A word spoken inconsiderately may turn back such an one from following Christ and seeking the heavenly inheritance. How grievous, not only not to enter in, but to hinder those who are entering in!

We may apply the subject even more gene-

rally. The careless and thoughtless, who live in complete neglect of religion-what is it that leads them to such a course but want of belief? They do not really embrace the Word of God. The things of eternity make little impression on them. Whatever they may profess, they have no real belief in what God has said. whether in the way of warning, of reproof, of invitation, or of promise. It is unbelief that is their chief hindrance. They continue in a careless and ungodly course because they do not believe. What God has said is to them but so many unmeaning words. They have no real wish for heaven, no sense of sin or danger or need, no fear of wrath; or, if ever they are troubled by unwelcome thoughts, those thoughts are quickly put away. They are living in unbelief. Unless they be brought to believe, that unbelief will shut them out of the promised land.

Once more. There may be a partial unbelief even in believers; for weakness of faith is but another name for unbelief mixing itself with faith. Now weakness of faith, though it will not, if the faith be true, hinder from entering in, does nevertheless deprive of much comfort, and greatly ruffle the peace and cloud

the prospect of the Christian. Of every kind, and in every degree, unbelief is an evil thing. It may take a thousand forms, but its nature is still the same. Let Christians beware of it! Let nothing shake their confidence in their Saviour; in His precious blood, His finished work, His all-prevailing intercession, His unfailing grace and love. Let nothing lead them to doubt the word and promises of Let those especially who have tasted that the Lord is gracious, and have by faith seen somewhat of the goodness of the land of promise, go up and possess the land, fearing no foe, but trusting fully in Almighty power and unfailing truth.

SERMON XIL

CHARITY.

1 Con. xiii. 4.—'Charity suffereth long, and is kind.'

This is a very remarkable chapter. It is all on one subject, charity. It gives a full-length portrait of this Christian grace, and all must be struck with the force, the fullness, and the earnestness with which the Apostle writes. One thing we clearly see, that he had considered charity in all its workings, that he did most earnestly desire that all should live in it, nay, that he thought it absolutely necessary in every Christian. And we must bear in mind, that this was not a mere opinion of his, but that what he wrote he wrote by inspiration of God.

But before we go further, let it be clearly understood what charity means.

The word is often used for giving to the poor, or for showing kindness to any one. If a beggar meets us, he asks our charity; if a person be noted for relieving the wants of others, he is called a charitable person. this meaning of the word is not, strictly speaking, its right meaning; nor is it the meaning of it here. Charity is a feeling or principle, not an action. It leads to actions, but it is not itself any action at all. In short. it simply means love—Christian love. A spring issues from the ground, and, as it flows down the hill-side, divides itself into several streams. One stream goes this way, another that. One makes those meadows so green, another turns the water-wheel in the valley. Each is useful, but each in its own way. Now it would be wrong to call any one of those streams the spring. The spring is that which supplies them all. The streams pursue their course, doing good wherever they go; but the spring is on the hill-side, or rather deep below the ground, where the eye cannot see it. In like manner, charity, or love, is the spring, and acts of kindness are the streams. The spring is in the heart; the streams appear in the life. Like the streams of water flowing this way and that way, and doing good wherever they go, so charity sends out kind thoughts, kind words, and kind actions, in all directions. But these, properly speaking, are no more charity than the streams are the spring.

Much is said in this chapter about charity. We are told what it is, and what it is not; what it does, and what it does not do; how it feels, what it seeks, what it takes pleasure in, and how long it will last. But let us fix our attention now on this one thing that is said about it, 'Charity suffereth long, and is kind.'

Of course, when it is said, 'Charity suffereth long,' the meaning is, that the person who has charity suffereth long. In other words, the charitable person is a long-suffering person. He is patient and forgiving. He willingly puts up with wrong. Even when treated as he feels he ought not to be treated, he is not angry or revengeful. To many an angry word does he return a soft answer. Many a slight does he pass by unnoticed. Many an unkind act does he repay with kindness. Is this easy? Far from it. Some are indeed by nature more smooth-tempered than others, but none are disposed by nature to return good for

evil. And many a person to whom the words, 'Charity suffereth long,' may now with truth be applied, was naturally by no means smooth-tempered. Formerly the hot temper was ready to rise at every provocation; angry feeling was easily excited, and hasty words were often on the tongue. But now there is something within, which checks, softens, and calms. It is charity. God has given him the spirit of love. And so this same person now bears what he would not have borne formerly, is patient under treatment that would then have filled him with thoughts of revenge, and answers gently words that would once have called forth the angry and bitter speech.

This is his habit. His long-suffering is shown, not merely now and then, in an occasional fit of forbearance and gentleness, but always. Such at least is his desire. He is long-suffering every day; to those with whom he lives continually; to those in the same neighbourhood, or in the same house; to those who often provoke him, or whose temper or turn of mind is not pleasing to him. Towards all such he tries to be long-suffering at all times. It has often a wonderful effect on them in the end.

But this is not all. 'Charity suffereth long, and is kind.'

Now there is a way of being outwardly longsuffering, without being kind. Some people bear things in sullen silence. There is no outbreak of passion, no show of resentment, no hasty reply; yet, under a calm appearance, there is secret ill-feeling. And there is yet another way. Some are long-suffering because they do not feel. Treatment that would make a hot-tempered person very angry, does not make them angry at all, simply because they do not care about it. But neither of these is charity's way of being long-suffering. 'Charity suffereth long, and is kind.' He who has Christian love in his heart bears ill-treatment, or puts up with what is unpleasing, not in sullen silence, or cold unconcern, but in a spirit of He is not without feeling. Unkindness. kindness cuts him to the heart. It pains him to meet with harshness in word or in deed. But, though pained, he is still kind. He has no feeling of resentment, or, if such a feeling arise in him, it is quickly subdued. He not only endures meekly, but is ready to do any act of kindness in his power, and is even glad if an opportunity occur of doing good to one

who has injured him. This is the triumph of charity, the victory of grace, 'to overcome evil with good.'

I say 'of grace,' for it is of grace. Some are by nature more kind and gentle than others, but true Christian love is the fruit of God's grace in the heart. Natural kindness is a lovely thing, but it is not charity. For charity is a *Christian* principle, drawing its life and power from Christ Himself. His love is its motive, His example is the pattern, and His power in the heart by the Spirit is that which begets, maintains, and increases it.

Yet all merely human instances of charity are imperfect. I said just now that 'charity suffereth long,' means that the person who has it is long-suffering. But how little we have of it! How often our charity fails when tried! In describing how the charitable man feels and acts, I have been forced to speak of him as if his charity were perfect! Alas! it is not so. But one example we have, that is quite perfect. 'God is love,' and it is only in Him that we see the words fully made good, 'Charity suffereth long, and is kind.'

Think of the life and death of Jesus. Consider how He went about doing good, how

forbearing He was towards His disciples, how gentle to those who opposed Him, how forgiving to His enemies. His was charity indeed. 'But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you.' Thus He taught, and thus He did. Even on the cross His prayer was, 'Father, forgive them!'

And think of God's general dealings. How long-suffering and kind He is! Long-suffering to His people, in their coldness of heart, their inconsistency, their short-comings and back-slidings. Long-suffering to sinners, in bearing with them, waiting for them, and sending them again and again His messages of mercy. Long-suffering and kind; making His sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sending rain on the just and on the unjust; blessing many who never thank Him; supplying the wants of numbers who never pray; and continuing life, and health, and the means of grace, to those who still refuse to come at His call.

He who is Love requires us to love one another. This is to be the badge of Christ's followers, 'By this shall all men know that ye are My disciples, if ye have love one to

another.' No gifts can make up for the absence of this grace. 'Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal.' A want of love, or at least of a desire for it, would prove us too surely to be none of His.

But grace can do wonders in smoothing a rugged temper, and subduing an impatient spirit; and He who knoweth our frame, and our manifold infirmities, will help us by His grace to love one another. 'Watch and pray, lest ye enter into temptation.' Watch against all that has heretofore led you to offend against the law of love; pray continually that the Holy Spirit may make you long-suffering and kind; and let the thought be ever present with you as your strongest motive to love, that all you have, and all you hope for, you owe to God's free love and mercy to you in Christ Jesus.

SERMON XIII.

THE BLESSING FOR ALL.

LUKE, xi. 27, 28.—'And it came to pass, as he spake these things, a certain woman of the company lifted up her voice, and said unto him, Blessed is the womb that bare thee, and the paps which thou hast sucked. But he said, Yea, rather, blessed are they that hear the word of God, and keep it.'

WE are not surprised at the feeling shown by this woman; it was but natural and proper. If she believed that Jesus was the Messiah, then her words exactly agree with those of the angel to Mary, 'Hail, thou that art highly favoured, the Lord is with thee: blessed art thou among women.' It was blessed indeed, to be chosen to give birth to the Saviour of the world. And even if she did not so believe, yet it is no wonder that, hearing the gracious

words of Jesus, and seeing His wonderful works and His pure and holy life, she was struck with the happiness of being the mother of such a son.

Our Lord did not rebuke the woman; rather He seems to have approved of her feeling. It was blessed to be the mother of such a son. Yet He corrected her speech, and turned her thoughts and ours into another channel, showing us a blessedness, if not greater in itself, yet greater to us, because more within our reach; 'Yea, rather, blessed are they that hear the word of God, and keep it.'

I. Our Lord probably meant especially those who heard from His own lips the word of God. At that very time He had been speaking many solemn and cheering truths; and this woman had been among the hearers. Blessed were they, He tells her, who should not only thus hear Him speak, but also keep and treasure up His words.

But what He said applies equally to us, who have the written word of God. We have it in our hands to read, or can hear it read by others, and we may hear also the preaching of the word. We 'hear the word of God' more

freely and fully than it ever was heard before. This part of the blessedness then is certainly ours.

But this is not all; there is another part. The word must be kept, as well as heard; 'Blessed are they that hear the word of God, and keep it.' We must not hear it carelessly; we must not be hearers only, forgetting it as soon as heard, having no value for it, and taking no pains about it. We are to guard it, and keep it—to treasure it in our hearts as a precious possession, to believe it, love it, and follow it; then the full blessing will be ours.

II. But why are they blessed who hear and keep the word of God?

1. Because the word of God is the word of life, the message of salvation. It tells us of a Saviour, speaks pardon and peace, and opens to us God's wondrous way of saving sinners. The works of God in nature tell us much, but they do not, and cannot, tell us this. Many books of man are written on these subjects; but they are but man's books after all. They do not speak with authority, they bring us no message from God Himself, and all the truth they contain is but drawn from the book of God.

Blessed are they then, who hear and keep the word of God Himself, because it tells them direct from God how He will sare them.

- 2. They are blessed also, because the word of God is a guide. It is a difficult path through the wilderness of this world. Many hindrances and perplexities meet us, and many different rules are offered for our guidance; such as fashion, custom, prudence, man's opinion. The word of God is the only sure guide. A simple and earnest following of this guide is the wisest, happiest, and safest course; and the poorest and most unlearned, who through grace take this course, have more security for going right than the greatest and wisest who follow any other. Therefore, again, they are blessed who hear and keep the word of God, because they have a sure guide through life.
- 3. The word of God also comforts in trouble, and therefore they are blessed who hear it and keep it. This world has its sorrows as well as its difficulties—sorrows many and great; but the word of God has comfort for them all. It is full of comfort. It has in it invitations and promises, declarations of God's love, examples of mourners whom He has comforted, and these in great number and variety. There is

no kind of trouble, for which some suitable comfort may not be found in the Bible. In times of deep sorrow, a life and power are found in the word of God which are sought in vain in other books; then the truth of what our Lord once said is felt indeed, 'The words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life.' It is the best of all books for those in trouble.

Thus for these three reasons (to mention no others) they are blessed who hear and keep the word of God. It is a word of life, a word of guidance, and a word of comfort.

III. This is a blessedness that is within our reach. Only one could have that other blessedness; and perhaps it was with a feeling of disappointment mixed with admiration that the woman said, 'Blessed is the womb that bare Thee.' That blessedness belonged to another, and never could be hers. Not so with the blessedness of which our Lord spoke; 'Blessed are they that hear the word of God and keep it.' They—not one, but many; not a single highly-favoured woman, but thousands, millions—all to whom the word of God should come, and who should receive it aright. This

makes the blessing ours; at least it may be ours.

Is it ours? Have we found the word of God blest to us? Has it led us to Christ and to peace? Has it been our guide in difficulty, our comfort in trouble? And is it so still?

If not, it must be from some fault in us; for there can be nothing wanting in the word itself. Perhaps it is because, though the word has been heard, it has not been kept. There are two things needful, hearing and keeping; it may be that we have only done one. There are thousands of such hearers; hearers, who are hearers only.

If it has been so with you hitherto, seek that it may be so no longer. You do hear the word; now begin to keep it.

First, pray for the Spirit, to cause the word to reach your heart. At every fresh hearing or reading, pray afresh. Seek thus that inward teaching which is from God alone.

Then, be diligent with regard to the word. Hear it with great earnestness, as the word of God; think over it, apply it to yourself, examine it—'search the Scriptures.' Consider that, whether you have hitherto found them or not, there are priceless treasures in God's word,

and that God is quite willing to give you a share. Never rest till you gain them. 'Seek, and ye shall find.'

Lastly, watch. Keep the word, guard it, watch against all that might lead you to let it slip, or might cause it to become unfruitful in you. Watch against the love of money, the love of pleasure, too great occupation in business, against the world in every shape. Watch against a cold heart, a trifling spirit, a careless walk. Watch against unprofitable reading and unprofitable company. Be very humble, very watchful, very prayerful.

Thus seek to treasure up the word in your heart. Keep well what you have learnt already, and try to add something continually to your store. 'Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly.' Have it there ready for use; to guide, cheer, and comfort you; let it be to you a word known, and loved, and followed, your close companion, your bosom friend; God speaking by it to your heart, and your heart listening to His voice.

Then you will be blessed indeed, called blessed by Christ Himself, more blessed than even she who gave birth to Him would have been, if she had not had this blessing too.

SERMON XIV

CHRISTMAS JOY.

LUKE, ii. 13, 14.—'And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God, and saying, Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men.'

It was to shepherds that the Saviour's birth was first made known. Before any of the great or learned knew what had taken place, these humble men heard the glad tidings. Thus early were the words fulfilled, 'The poor have the gospel preached to them.'

But though brought to humble men, yet an angel was the bearer of the good news. It was an honour even to an angel to bring such a message.

How was it brought? When Jesus was born

at Bethlehem, there were shepherds watching their flocks by night in the pastures near,a general practice in that warm climate and open country. While thus engaged, an angel appeared to them, and a glorious light shone around them. Their first feeling was fear,-'they were sore afraid;' but the angel bade them not fear. 'Fear not,' he said; 'for behold I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people: for unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord.' There was no cause therefore for fear, but every reason for joy. A Saviour was born,—the promised Messiah was come, Christ the Lord. That very day, in the village close by, this birth had taken place, and there they should find Him; not however, as they might have expected, in some grand place, with all the signs of heavenly greatness: 'Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger.' A helpless infant, born at a village inn, the child of poor parents, -in this humble guise should they find the Saviour of mankind.

Such was the message. And then, 'suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the

heavenly host, praising God, and saying, Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men.'

Thus was the birth of Christ made known to shepherds, and thus did holy angels celebrate it.

Christmas-day is kept in remembrance of this very thing. That for which angels thus sang praises, Christians also profess to praise God for at this season. Let us learn from them a lesson of praise.

'Glory to God in the highest!' Our hearts should join in these words. To God be all the glory of redemption. His be the praise, for His is all the work. Glory be to Him in heaven above, and in earth below. Let the hosts of angels praise Him, let the redeemed in heaven praise Him, let the redeemed upon earth praise Him too. May millions of souls, redeemed and saved through Him who was born as at this time at Bethlehem, be for the praise and glory of God for ever!

'And on earth peace.' Man was at enmity with God through sin. A load of guilt lay on him, his heart was estranged, his conscience was defiled. But Christ came as 'the Prince of Peace.' He paid our debt with His blood,

atoned for our sins, took away our condemnation, made our peace, and restored us to the favour of God. Every believer has a share in these unspeakable blessings. All who will may now be at peace with God. The way is open: Jesus is the way. And when thus at peace with God, then men become at peace with one another; not indeed perfectly, for sin cleaves to them still, yet in great measure; so that even now, wherever the gospel goes, there peace and love are found in place of war and The happy time will come, when war and strife will be done away completely and for ever. That will be, when 'the Prince of Peace' comes in His glory, and takes to Himself His kingdom.

'Good-will toward men.' This also was proclaimed by the angels in their song. The coming of Christ was through the 'good will,' or favour, of God. He looked with pity upon our fallen race, and sent His Son to redeem us. And now, whoever has received Christ by faith is in a state of acceptance; God's anger has passed away from him; he is looked upon with favour; the sunshine of God's love is upon him; and not only so, but the believer himself, reconciled and accepted in Christ, is enabled to

do that which is pleasing to God. Though still sinful in himself, and even his best doings not without some stain of sin, yet, as joined to Christ by faith, he is well-pleasing in the sight of God. The fruits of the Spirit appear in him, and he lives to God's glory. Thus in Christ God is reconciled, and man, sinful man, becomes well-pleasing to Him.

Such are the blessings of the coming of Christ. This is why angels sang praise to God, this is why Christians still rejoice at this season.

But let us look to it that our Christmas joy be a right joy, and that our Christmas be spent in a right way.

The birthday of Christ should be kept with joy by Christians for this simple reason, that they love Him and honour Him, and obtain so many blessings from His birth. Angels rejoiced at His coming. But He came to redeem, not angels, but men. How ought men then to rejoice! Yet many celebrate Christmas without one thought of Christ and His salvation. This may be joy, but it is not Christmas joy. The only true Christmas joy is joy for the coming of Christ the Saviour; and who can have this joy, but one who has

felt his need of Christ, and sought and found

Again, since it is the birth of Christ that we commemorate, let the season be spent in such a way as will please Him. Many make Christmas a time of riot and excess,-many even of those who profess to regard it as their Saviour's birthday! Let not idle, worldly customs be followed with regard to keeping Christmas; let there be no senseless, godless merriment. Let Christians remember their Saviour; let their hearts be filled with grateful, happy thoughts of Him; let Him, who ought to be at all times in their minds, be so especially at this season; let Him be remembered by each Christian in private, remembered in the congregation, remembered in the family. And when scattered households meet, and fathers and mothers, brothers and sisters, again sit together round the hearth, and cheerful family talk goes round, then let not the cause of Christmas rejoicing be forgotten, - let His birthday be kept indeed, and let Him be chief guest and Lord of the feast.

SERMON XV.

EBEN-EZER; OR, THE STONE OF HELP. FOR THE NEW YEAR.

1 Sam. vii. 12.—'Then Samuel took a stone, and set it between Mizpeh and Shen, and called the name of it Ebenezer, saying, Hitherto hath the Lord helped us.'

On several occasions in the history of the people of Israel, when some special help or deliverance had been received, stones were set up by way of memorial. Such a case is related in this chapter. The children of Israel were put in great fear by the Philistines. They begged Samuel to cry to the Lord for them, and Samuel did so. The Lord heard him, and granted deliverance. A great thunder discomfited the Philistines; they were smitten before Israel, and fled. Then Samuel took a stone, and set it up on the spot, as recorded in the text, calling it by the name,

Eben-ezer, or, The stone of help; and saying, 'Hitherto hath the Lord helped us.' It was to be both a memorial of the past, and an encouragement for the future; a token of gratitude, and a ground of trust.

God, in His mercy, has brought us to see the beginning of another year. Such seasons should not be suffered to pass without serious thought. We ought to look back upon God's gracious dealings with us, and set up a memorial of them in our hearts. How much cause have we all to say, 'Hitherto hath the Lord helped us!'

I. These words in themselves imply dependence on God. There would be no help required, if there were not need, insufficiency, weakness, helplessness. This is in truth our condition. Our wants are many, we are weak, helpless, and prone to go astray, and we have no strength, no foreknowledge, no grace or goodness, of our own. This is always our state. It is so now. It is thus that we are entering on a new year; not knowing what is before us; unable to foresee, to order, or to hinder; dependent upon God for all things temporal and for all things spiritual; needing

His help in every way. Thus we began last year, and thus we begin the present year. Whether we know and feel it or not, this is our state.

- II. The Lord has helped us. We have reason to say so with regard to the past year.
- 1. Temporally He has helped us. We are brought thus far in safety. We could not know at the beginning of last year that it would be Perhaps it seemed unlikely with some. Yet so it has been. God has helped us thus Not all in the same way. His manner of dealing has been various with various people. With some the year has run a smooth and easy course, much like other years that went before; with others it has been a year of unusual events. Some have been helped through poverty, some through sickness, some through sorrow, and some perhaps through some great and peculiar trial, the greatest they ever had. But all have been helped, and helped by God. Let us never he blind to His hand. The Israelites themselves fought against the Philistines, yet Samuel taught them to attribute all their deliverance to God, 'Hitherto hath the Lord helped us.'
 - 2. He has helped us spiritually also; in soul

as well as in body. We have had our temptations, our fears, our struggles; at least many of us have. It has not been all sunshine in our souls, the way has not been smooth throughout. Yet we have been helped. To those who have sought it, grace has been given according to their need. Prayer has been heard, hearts have been cheered, many a fear has been taken away, light and comfort have been given. And in the way of duty-duty that seemed difficult and yet was plainly duty-help has been given to many; gracious help, full and sufficient help, such as was hardly thought possible beforehand. Look back on those times. not past temptations, fears, struggles, prayers and help, be forgotten. Set up a stone of memorial. Say gratefully, 'Hitherto hath the Lord helped us.'

Even those who have not sought, have found. Many who have felt no need, and put up no prayer, have been helped. Such help at least as the barren fig-tree found, have they found. God's forbearance has been shown towards them, they are spared to begin another year. Ah! do not overlook this. Why has this help been given? Why has this forbearance been shown? Was it, that He saw you were not

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ready? Oh, to what should this lead you in the new year that has now opened upon you?

III. Hitherto hath the Lord helped us. We are accustomed to use this word 'hitherto,' when we have reached a certain point, but have still further to go. It is just so with us in the journey of life. 'Hitherto hath the Lord helped us;' thus far on our way-to the close of another year. Temporally and spiritually He has helped us up to this point. Each in his own way, His children have thus far received help; and those who are wanderers from Him too, for they have been spared to this time. But the end is not yet reached. We have further to go. The stone of memorial therefore which we set up in our hearts in gratitude for past help, should influence our thoughts with regard to the future also.

1. In the way of serious thought and self-examination. This 'Hitherto' suggests, as I said, that there is still something before us. But that something is less than it was. There is now more behind us and less before us than there was a year ago. Our 'hitherto' expresses now a different point in our life. We are so much nearer the end. How shall we

live, after so much help, so many mercies, such continued forbearance? How are we living? We are nearer to the end; are we nearer to God? We are older in years; are we older in grace? Is there any progress, any change, since last year began? Or are some beginning this year just as they began the last; as cold, as careless, as lifeless as to spiritual things; time, and means of grace, and God's various gifts, all seemingly bestowed in vain? The fig-tree was spared for 'this year also;' that was all. Oh, let the careless take warning! God's forbearance towards the impenitent will not be for ever. This 'hitherto' will have an end.

2. But the stone of memorial should also encourage us. He who has helped us, will help us; all at least who own, and seek, and trust in His help. Yes, the Lord hath helped hitherto, and He will not now withdraw His help. Christians, fear not! He in whom you trust will never fail you. Jesus Christ, your Saviour, is the same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever; your Father is an unchanging Father; the Spirit's presence is still promised to those who seek. Be not anxious about the coming year. Fear not even temptations and trials. Watch

and pray, but do not fear. Your Friend will not forsake you. Your Helper hitherto will be your Helper still. He has help sufficient for all time, and for every need. The untrodden path of the new year shall be even as the now familiar way of the old. Its events indeed may be different, its course unlike that of any year before; but in this at least the future will be as the past, that God will be your God still, and Jesus still your unchanging Lord and Saviour. 'Hitherto hath the Lord helped' you. At every point of your journey you will still have cause to say the same. And never will that help cease, till the last stage in the journey be past, and your Helper shall bring you safely home.

SERMON XVI.

THE FAITHFUL THREE.

Dan. iii. 16-18.—'Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego, answered and said to the king, O Nebuchadnezzar, we are not careful to answer thee in this matter. If it be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and he will deliver us out of thine hand, O king. But if not, be it known unto thee, O king, that we will not serve thy gods, nor worship the golden image which thou hast set up.'

THE Jews were at this time in captivity at Babylon, and these three young men were of that people. They were friends and companions of Daniel, and at his request had been set over the affairs of the province of Babylon. This made some of the Chaldeans, the people of the land, jealous and angry. They could not bear that these foreigners should be put into the high places which they themselves would have

been so glad to fill; and doubtless they were continually on the watch to ruin them, as was the case afterwards with regard to Daniel himself.

An opportunity soon arose. King Nebuchadnezzar, in his foolish and wicked pride, forgetting, as it seems, the lesson which God had taught him in the dream interpreted by Daniel, made a huge image of gold, and set it up in the plain of Dura, and commanded that all people should worship it. The signal was to be given by music. As soon as the sound was heard, all were to fall down and worship; and any who should not do so were to be cast into the midst of a burning fiery furnace. This proclamation was publicly made, and the people generally obeyed it. At the sound of the music all fell down and worshipped the image.

All but Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego. They alone did not worship. Where Daniel was, we are not told; but we may be quite sure that if he had been there, he too would have refused to worship the image. Now their enemies thought that they had their rivals in their power. They went at once to the king and accused them. 'There are certain

Jews,' said they, 'whom thou hast set over the affairs of the province of Babylon—Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego; these men, O king, have not regarded thee: they serve not thy gods, nor worship the golden image which thou hast set up.'

The king, full of rage, sent for the men. 'Is is true,' he said, 'O Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego; do not ye serve my gods, nor worship the golden image which I have set up?' However, he would give them another opportunity. If, even now, they would fall down and worship when the music sounded, all would be well; but if not, then they should be cast into the furnace. 'And who,' added he impiously, 'is that God, that shall deliver you out of my hands?'

There was much to make them afraid. They saw rage and fury in the king's face, they heard his angry words, they knew his absolute power; they were well aware of the malice of their accusers; they saw that all the people bowed down to the image, and that none but they dared to disobey the king. There was much to make them afraid. Yet no sign of fear appears in their conduct. They do not even hesitate. They take no time for consideration. They ask

for no delay. At once they reply in the words of the text: 'O Nebuchadnezzar, we are not careful to answer thee in this matter.' They were not careful to answer the king; they were in no doubt or anxiety as to what they should do; their duty was quite plain. If it came to the worst, their God could save them. Even if the king should cast them into the furnace, He could deliver them from it. Such was their firm belief. But, in any case, they would not worship the idol. If they must die for obeying God, die they would. Come what might, they would not serve the false gods of the king, nor worship the image which he had set up.

We know how the history ends. They were cast into the furnace, and came out unhurt. Their faith was answered; God saved them from the fire; the malice of their enemies was defeated; the king himself made a public decree acknowledging the one true God; and Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego were advanced to yet further honour.

It is a striking history, one of the most striking in the Bible. But it is much more. It is full of instruction and encouragement.

We live in happier times than Shadrach and his companions. We are not subject to the will of a tyrant; we are free to worship God according to our conscience. The law of the land protects us, instead of oppressing us; and so complete is our religious liberty, that no one can either be forced to worship against his will, or hindered from worshipping as he sees right.

Yet, though we are safe from legal persecution, occasions do arise when the servant of God must make his choice between following Him and pleasing man. At such times the conduct of the three Hebrew young men may well be taken as an example.

The customs of the world are often opposed to the word of God. There are worldly pleasures, for instance, in which the servant of God must not take part. Yet the world will dislike him if he refuse; and a young Christian finds it hard to meet the scorn and dislike of those around him. But his course is plain. He must be faithful. He must not bow down to the image of public opinion, when that opinion is against the word of God.

Sometimes the Christian must face yet more than scorn and dislike in serving God. A clerk, a shopman, a servant, a workman, may be required by a master, on pain of dismissal, to do what is against his conscience. For instance, orders may be given that such and such goods are to be represented to be what they are not, or Sunday work beyond what is necessary may be required. Is there any doubt what the right course is? None. God must be obeyed, not man. Even at the risk of loss of place, the plain, straightforward line of duty must be followed.

In such cases a real pressure is brought to bear on the person, though he cannot be actually punished for doing right. Men have at all times much power to do good or harm to one another. It must be so. It is no light thing to lose a good place; it is no trifle even to be scorned and disliked. And persecution of this kind may still take place.

Yet what is such persecution as this, compared with that which these three had to meet? What is contempt, what is loss of place, compared with loss of life itself, and in so dreadful a way?

How noble was their conduct! Perfectly respectful to the king, yet prompt, firm, decided, unhesitating. No balancing of one consideration against another, no thought of consequences, no suiting of their principles to their

circumstances. Calmly they braved the wrath of the king, prepared to meet all that he could do against them, and trusting in God to deliver them.

When duty is plain, we need not take long to consider. Nay, it is dangerous then to hesi-The heart is deceitful; and, in the face of difficulty and danger, we might be tempted to persuade ourselves against our better judgment that a wrong course was, under the circumstances, allowable. If any danger, or any authority, could rightly outweigh plain duty, the danger of an awful death at the command of an absolute king might have done so. these men did not hesitate a moment. Nor must we. We must not stop to think of consequences, we must not give ourselves time to go wrong, we must not pretend to comply. In such cases the first thought is usually the best.

Observe the fullness and simplicity of their faith. They thought that God would deliver them from the furnace; nay, they seem to have had a firm conviction that He would. 'If it be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and he will deliver us out of thine hand, O king.' Yet if

not, if it should please God to take them to Himself by that fiery way, still they would serve Him and trust Him, still they would never worship the image. True faith does not dictate to God, but leaves ways and means, and time and circumstances, to Him. Such was the faith of these men. Whatever it might please God to do with them, they would commit themselves to Him, and follow Him fully. 'But if not,' said they, 'be it known unto thee, O king, that we will not serve thy gods nor worship the golden image which thou hast set up.'

Sometimes the Christian has been tempted into a less decided line of conduct; he has tampered with the difficulty, and tried to take a middle course. Has such a course brought peace? Has it even delivered him from his difficulty? Is it not, in fact, a trying to serve two masters? And we know what the Lord Jesus said of that.

If ever there has been in us such weakness and unfaithfulness, let us henceforth resolve to serve God faithfully and fully. These three young men never gave way, but were bold for God from the very first, and God owned and delivered them. But God is gracious and mer-

ciful. Even if there has been a want of faithfulness, or an actual denying of Him through the fear of man, yet He will forgive for Christ's sake. Peter was pardoned and restored, and became, through grace, one of the boldest of the servants of Christ. The like pardoning mercy is ready to be bestowed on all who seek it for Jesus' sake, and the same grace will be given in answer to prayer. Nothing should humble us more than the recollection of past unfaithfulness. Let it humble us: but let it not lead us to despair. For all past weakness and sinfulness, for every compliance with wrong, for all guilty silence when we ought to have spoken out for our Lord, for all fear of man, for all unfaithfulness to God, there is forgiveness, full and free, through the blood of Jesus.

Let us seek grace to walk henceforth more humbly, prayerfully, and faithfully. Taught by past experience, let the Christian more than ever watch and pray; and let it be his firm determination, made in the strength of God, that he will never again give way to sin or the world, but will henceforth follow God fully. This is the right, the safe, the happy course.

SERMON XVII.

CONSIDER YOUR WAYS.

Hag. i. 5.—'Now therefore thus saith the Lord of hosts, Consider your ways.'

This was God's message to the people of Jerusalem: but it is His word to us, as well as to them. He would have all to consider their ways.

People are too apt to live without thought. They fall into habits almost insensibly. One person does what he sees another do; there are many who follow custom blindly; and numbers have no other rule than their own pleasure.

God would not have us live so. He would have us *think*, and think seriously. He says to us, 'Consider your ways,' set your heart on your ways, think about them, examine them well.

Now this is a thing, not merely to hear about, or to read about, but to do. Each person is to do it for himself, to consider his own ways; and a very serious and important thing it is. For every way has an end; there is no way that does not lead somewhere.

As a help in this work and duty of considering our ways, here are some questions which we may ask ourselves about them.

- 1. Has conscience anything to say against our way? Do we know, or even suspect, that our way is not a right way?—How is our time passed? What are we doing on our week-days? How are we spending our Sundays? Of what kind are our pursuits, our pleasures, our companions? Has conscience anything to say against us on these points, and does it sometimes speak out?
- 2. Are our ways according to the Bible? It is very important to have a clear conscience; but conscience itself must be taught by the word of God. It is not enough that we should do what we think to be right; we must do what God says is right. Are our ways then according to the Bible? With many short-

comings, can we yet take that blessed book and say, 'This is what I desire to follow; this is my rule, my guide, my pattern; this is how I wish and try to live?'

- 3. Another question we should ask ourselves is this, What shall we think of our ways hereafter? Whatever we may think of them now, are they such as we shall look back upon with comfort in time to come? Sickness and the approach of death give very different views of things from such as we have in life and health. What will our ways seem to us when eternity is near? What will our thoughts be, when we look back upon our present time, and the way in which we are spending it; upon the opportunities and means, the gifts and talents, which we now have, and which we are certainly using in some way or other? What shall we think of our present ways, when we come to consider them as past ways?
- 4. Another solemn question may be drawn directly from the Bible itself? We read there of two ways, the broad way, and the narrow way; the way of death, and the way of life. Our way is one or the other of these. Which?

This is a solemn question; and all the more so on this account, that many are in the broad way, and but few in the narrow. Men do not like to think this. But it is true; as true as the word of truth itself can make it: 'Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be that go in thereat: because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it.'* Among which are we, the many or the few? Which is our way, the broad or the narrow? What will our end be, destruction or life?

5. Jesus said, 'I am the way.' Is He our way? It is not enough to be sincere and in earnest; we must go by that way which God has provided, or we shall certainly find that our way is not the way of life. Jesus is the way, the only way; no man cometh unto the Father but by Him, neither is there any other name by which we can be saved. When we are considering our ways, we must not leave out this point. We must make sure that our hopes are built on the right foundation, that * Matt. vii. 13, 14.

we are looking to Christ alone, that our feet are on the rock. If Christ be not to us the way, the truth, and the life, then, whatever our ways may be in other points, they are certainly wrong, deeply and fatally wrong.

6. Once more. We read of Enoch that he 'walked with God;' and the same is said of Noah, and that too in an ungodly age. Here is another thing to ask ourselves with regard to our ways. Do we walk with God? Are we in the habit of holding communion with Him in secret? And at all times, in private and in public, do we try to maintain a sense of His presence, to live near to Him, and to follow His holy will? The Apostle Paul writes to the Corinthians, 'Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you?' Is that true of us? Have we the Spirit of God? Are we growing in grace? Are we making progress? As years advance, do our souls advance too?

Here then are six different points of inquiry about our ways: Are they against conscience? Are they according to the Bible? What shall we think of them hereafter? Are we in the

broad way, or the narrow? Is CHRIST our way? Do we walk with God?

It is God Himself who bids us consider our ways: 'Now therefore thus saith the Lord of hosts, Consider your ways.' It is a plain direct message from Him, as though the prophet had said, 'Now therefore it is not I that speak to you, but the Lord Himself; He who knows all your doings, He whose eye is always upon you, He who is aware of every secret motive that influences you, He bids you stop and think; He Himself calls upon you to turn away your thoughts from trifles and from worldly things, and to fix them upon yourselves and your ways. This is the Lord's will, the Lord's command.'

Why does God thus command us? That if our ways be wrong, we may amend them; that we may repent and turn; that we may seek and find mercy; that so we may be safe and happy. 'God is Love.' In His very warnings and exhortations He is love.

The people at Jerusalem did consider their ways. We read that they obeyed the voice of the Lord their God, and the words of Haggai the prophet, as the Lord their God sent him, and the people did fear before the

Lord.' And what followed? 'Then spake Haggai the Lord's messenger in the Lord's message unto the people, saying, I am with you, saith the Lord.' Even so will the Lord receive, pardon, save, and bless all who consider their ways, and turn, and seek Him by Christ Jesus.

'I am with you,' He said to the repentant people of Jerusalem. 'I am with you,' He says to all who hear, believe, and obey. And when God is with us, then our ways are happy indeed. For then we have a Father in heaven; then we have a Saviour; then we have a Divine Comforter; then we have a Friend in all trouble, a helper in all difficulty. Then too we have pardon and peace, a conscience clear, a mind at ease, and a bright hope for eternity.

All this may be ours, freely and fully ours, if we seek it in and through Christ Jesus; and the very first step is to consider our ways, as before God, asking in this very thing the help of His Holy Spirit.

SERMON XVIII.

GOOD AND BAD COMPANY.

Prov. xiii. 20.—' He that walketh with wise men shall be wise; but a companion of fools shall be destroyed.'

MEN influence one another more than they think. Living, as they do, associated in so many ways, they are continually learning from one another. We mix with others every day; we see what they do, and hear what they say, and exchange with them thoughts and feelings. There must be some effect from this, for good or for evil. It is very important therefore what kind of people we mix with.

In part we have no choice. A person can seldom choose his neighbours; he must live where circumstances place him. Nor can a working man choose his workmates; they are such as his master is pleased to employ. But in great measure we may choose. Neighbours and workmates we may be forced to take as we find them; but our close friends, the companions whom we seek, may be of our own choice. It is of great consequence to choose well.

This text, like so many in the book of Proverbs, has two parts in contrast: the good side of the case, and the bad side. We will consider them in their order.

I. The good side is this, 'He that walketh with wise men shall be wise.'

'Wise men' means here, not learned men, or men of worldly wisdom, but the *truly* wise—good, upright, religious men, such as have that wisdom which is from above.

And walking with them means keeping company with them, making friends of them, and so going in their ways and falling in with their habits.

For it will be so, if we make them our companions. The text says so: 'He that walketh with wise men shall be wise.'

It is not that the wise are always advising, warning, and teaching those who are their companions. They do not neglect this when it is right and fit to do it; but it is not so

much in this way that they lead others, as by the force of example. They teach more by deed than by word. Mind acts upon mind. Character tells upon character.

We see how a good man acts under various circumstances, and we learn much from what we see. We see how he behaves in prosperity, and how he bears trouble. We hear how he speaks when he is provoked. We notice what return he makes when he is ill-treated. Being much in his company, we not only see what he does, but learn often why he does it. His motives, as well as his actions, are in most cases clear to his friends.

All this cannot but have an influence with us. When we are placed in like circumstances, we think what he would do. When we are illtreated or spoken against, we remember how he used to act and speak in return. Thus his example weighs with us. We can recall perhaps many words of his, full of sound advice; but still more does his consistent Christian conduct live in our remembrance. Almost without knowing it, his companions are the better for such a man.

Not that any power but that of the Holy Spirit can really change the heart, or turn a bad man into a good one. That work is God's, and God's alone. But the company of the wise is a *means*, and a very important one. And even if the great change be not wrought, some good effect is produced, and thus the way is prepared for some other instrument.

Do not most of us know some, whose society, we feel, does us great good? Have we not among our friends some one at least, by intercourse with whom we feel the tone of our thoughts to be raised? We do not speak foolishly in that friend's presence. By a kind of instinct, we fall into his tone of conversation, and catch the spirit of his character. We never leave his presence without feeling that we are the better for having been with him. So true it is, that 'He that walketh with wise men shall be wise.'

II. But, alas! the bad side of the case is equally true—'A companion of fools shall be destroyed.

Now, here again, 'fools' do not mean people without any talent or sense. On the contrary, the very persons here meant may be clever, interesting, and even learned. But they are foolish, or unwise, in a scriptural sense. With

all their gifts of mind and all their pleasant qualities, they are without true religion, they are ungodly. And none are so foolish as the ungodly.

Again, to be a 'companion' of such does not mean being thrown into their company by circumstances over which we have no control; as by having them for neighbours, or workmates, or being members of the same family. But it means choosing them as our companions, and making them our friends when we might choose otherwise.

Of such as do so it is said, 'A companion of fools shall be destroyed.'

This word 'destroyed,' or 'broken,' as it is in the margin, may be taken in two ways:

1. The person himself will gradually be corrupted: his character will grow worse; his habits will become like those of his evil companions; he will lose his sense of right and wrong, and all good principles which he may once have had will be lost or stifled.

Take a case in point. A young man leaves the home of his childhood, where he has been carefully brought up, and goes out into the world. Forced to part from those who have hitherto taught and guided him, he is now thrown among new companions. Alas! he does not choose well; he goes with those whose words and actions ought to have shown him at once that they were no proper friends for him; he does not leave their company, even when he finds how much that is wrong is hidden under their pleasant manners; he goes on still as 'a companion of fools;' and quickly do the words come true, he is destroyed—that is, his principles are corrupted, his conscience is blunted, his early lessons are forgotten. Soon he learns to do just as those around him do, and the very words that shocked him at the first hearing are his own common words now.

But it is not only the young to whom this part of the text applies. How often it happens that persons of riper years and longer experience let themselves go into company and form friendships that do them nothing but harm. A worldly set of acquaintance is like water wearing the stones. Such society gradually eats out the life of religion, and lowers the tone of the character. Religious impressions grow dim; there is a gradual loss of interest in spiritual things; and the more such society is frequented, the less pleasure is felt in the company of the good, and the less taste is there

for the things of God. There is a slow but sure influence for evil.

- 2. But the word 'destroyed,' in its full sense, means more than this.
- 'A companion of fools shall be destroyed' that is, he will come to ruin at last. This is the end of the foolish, or ungodly, themselves; and this, unless they stop and turn, must be the end of those who seek their company and learn their ways.

The course of sinners is a downward course: there is no standing still on that road; it is a going on from bad to worse. Take the case of a man led into bad company through fondness for drink. When first he began to join this company he was but a moderate drinker compared with many; but being with them, he does as they do. If they drink more, so does he; if they sit on far into the night, he does so too. He drinks more and more, and keeps later hours. He used to be seldom overcome by drink. though constantly drinking more than was good; now, he is not often master of himself; he is fast going down hill. Year after year he is growing worse in every way; his whole character and conduct is sinking lower. What will the end be? True, grace can work a

change still. And some, even without a change of heart, have entirely given up drinking, when they seemed to be at their very worst. But is this common? No, indeed. More often by far, the words come strictly true in such a case, 'A companion of fools shall be destroyed.' Led on by evil company, the man becomes settled in evil habits, and comes to a miserable end—the drunkard's end, ruin of body, and ruin of soul.

Yet these companions called themselves friends! And while the cup went round, and the laugh was loud, they seemed dear friends indeed. But change the scene. Let the man be laid on a sick-bed, ill in body, but worse in mind—weak, sinking, desponding, in need of comfort. Where are his friends now? Is there one of them all, who will come and watch at his bedside, and help to supply his wants, and speak words of comfort in his ear? Alas, no! He finds out now what the companionship of fools is worth. They courted him in health, but they forsake him in sickness.

And now perhaps the sick man is visited by some whose company he shunned before, and whom perhaps he used to laugh at with the friends of his choice. But they forget all that;

they only know that a poor sinful man lies in need of help and comfort, and they come to give what they can. Happy for him, if it be not too late. Happy if, through God's great mercy, the word of life and salvation, spoken by these true comforters, may yet touch his heart, and lead him to One who is mighty to save.

One friend who loves the Lord Jesus is worth more than all companions in folly or sin. Have you such a friend? Or do you know of any true Christian, who would be your friend if you would let him? Prize that man's friendship above all; seek his company; join him in his pursuits: for 'he that walketh with wise men shall be wise;' that very man may be God's instrument of good to your soul.

But are you thrown much with the ungodly and careless? Join them no more than you need. Be kind and friendly to all, but do not make such your friends, your chosen companions. Beware! Remember how many have been destroyed through the companionship of fools. Do not trust in your good principles or good resolutions. 'Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall.' 'Watch and pray, lest ye enter into temptation.'

Lastly, let us look at the subject for a moment from another point of view. If the influence of companions is so great for good or for evil, let us seek that our influence may be for good on all around us. We have an influence, whether we think so or not. We cannot live near to others-in the same house, or street, or neighbourhood-without doing them good or harm by our example. Let us seek grace so to live that all around us may be the better for Let our constant aim be the glory of God and the good of souls. And let it be the dearest wish of our hearts, to bring others to the knowledge of that blessed Redeemer, who is the hope and joy of our souls, and who Himself said, 'Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.'

SERMON XIX.

THE PHARISEE AND THE PUBLICAN.

LUKE, xviii. 9-14.—'And he spake this parable unto certain which trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others: Two men went up into the temple to pray; the one a Pharisee, and the other a Publican. The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this Publican. I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that I possess. And the Publican, standing afar off, would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, God be merciful to me a sinner. I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other: for every one that exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted.'

THESE two men went to the same place, at the same time, and seemingly for the same purpose; yet how different were they in heart and character! There is a like difference now among those who meet together in the house of

God; and sometimes even among those who come together in a more private way for prayer, and for the hearing of the Word. God only knows the heart.

But though these two men both went up into the temple, yet they did not worship in the same part of it. It may have been because the Jewish law did not allow the publican to be where the Pharisee was (for there were different courts, to which different classes of people might come), or it may have been through his deep humility, that the publican 'stood afar off,' while the Pharisee worshipped in the inner part. There are no different courts in the Lord's house now. High and low, Jew and Gentile, may worship together. The gospel has made all one. Whatever differences there may be in other places, in the house of God all stand on one footing.

Thus these two men prayed in different places; but their prayers were more different still.

'The Pharisee stood, and prayed thus with himself.' Some think the meaning to be that he stood by himself while he prayed; and this would quite agree with the general character and practice of the Pharisees, who thought themselves peculiarly holy, and wished to keep others at a humble distance. At all events, he stood up boldly in his proud self-righteousness, and spoke the words of prayer apart.

Prayer! It is called prayer, because it professed to be so; but there was nothing of prayer in it. The words were addressed to the Almighty, 'God, I thank thee;' but his thoughts were upon himself. He was really speaking to himself, rather than to God. And what words they were! True, the opening words show nothing wrong; 'God, I thank Thee;'—fit words with which to begin prayer; but we judge of the feeling from which they sprang by what follows, 'God, I thank Thee that I am not as other men are.'

In the presence of God, and in the very act of prayer, how could his thoughts be fixed upon the faults of others? Had he no sins of his own to confess? What had he to do with 'other men' at such a moment? Who had taught him to compare himself with his neighbours, rather than with God's holy law? If he had but looked into that perfect law, how different would his feelings and his prayer have been! We can hardly think of anything less like prayer than what is here de-

scribed—this proud Pharisee standing up before God, and thanking Him that he is so much better than others; speaking with contempt of the poor publican, whom he noticed at that moment in a distant part of the temple, when he ought to have been humbling himself before God. How different from the Apostle Paul, who, when he mentioned others as sinners, called himself the *chief* of sinners!

It may be that there was truth in the Pharisee's words; he may not have been an extortioner, or unjust, or an adulterer; he may have been free from the special sins of which the publican had been guilty. But little did he think that at that very moment, when engaged in the outward act of prayer, he was guilty of a sin as great perhaps in the sight of God as extortion, injustice, or adultery. The same word which condemns these, condemns pride also; and we may well believe that there is nothing more displeasing to God than a haughty self-righteousness, and despising of others.

This was all his prayer. Not a word of confession of sin, not one cry for mercy, no acknowledgment of need, not one petition of any kind,—nothing asked for, either temporal or spiritual. In his blind self-satisfaction, he

flattered himself that he was doing something meritorious in praying as he did, and thought that he was bringing something to God, whereas he ought to have gone to God to receive all from Him.

Now let us turn to the other man. How different a prayer is here! Even in outward appearance all is strikingly different. There he stands afar off. His head is bowed, his eyes are downcast, he smites upon his breast, and the only words that burst at once from heart and lips are these, 'God be merciful to me a sinner!'

This was prayer indeed. The publican had learnt what the Pharisee had never learnt. He had come to the knowledge that he was a sinner, and in need of mercy. Doubtless the Pharisee was far superior to him in learning; with every part of the Jewish law he was probably well acquainted, he knew every fact in Old Testament history, he was well versed in the ceremonial of his religion; but how much more did this despised and ignorant publican know than he! All the Pharisee's knowledge was in the head; the publican's heart had been taught of God.

If the publican had been like the Pharisee,

he might have said, 'God, I thank Thee that I am not so bad as others of my trade. I am not wholly set upon gain. I have some care for religion. Even now I am come up to Thy house to pray.' But his thoughts were not on others, but on himself; and not upon his fancied excellence, but upon his sins. He is smitten with a sense of sin, it weighs upon his soul. seeks not to hide his sin; he comes to God just as he is, and sues for mercy. How humbly he sues!-with downcast eye, and smitten breast, hardly daring to pray, yet finding in prayer his only relief. 'Can such an one as I hope to be forgiven?' Yes, poor publican! yes, all who are of the publican's spirit; you may hope; for Jesus Himself speaks comfort and forgiveness to you.

'I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other.' Justified—that is, pardoned, acquitted, accepted. The Pharisee confessed nothing, asked nothing, received nothing. Proud he came from his house, proud he went back again—unhumbled, unblest. The publican went up to the house of God with a heavy burden, the burden of his sins. Did he lose his burden there? Surely we may believe that he did. God, who heard

his prayer, and granted him mercy, doubtless gave him also the comforting sense of forgiveness. The publican went down to his house comforted as well as justified. His burden was gone, his sins were forgiven.

This comfort, this blessing, was not for him alone: 'For every one that exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted.' There is no comfort for the proud and self-righteous; but there is all comfort for the humble and contrite. Jesus died for sinners: there is the ground and source of all our It is when we cast aside all thought of our own goodness, and approach God as sinners, pleading the merits of Christ alonethen it is that we receive pardon and peace. There are still some who try to comfort themselves with the thought of their religious observances, their moral life, their being not so bad as others. This is not the way to pardon, this is not the way to peace. Christ is the way, the only way. We must go to Him, casting aside all other hope and dependence. 'God, be merciful to me a sinner,'-we may add, 'for Jesus Christ my Saviour's sake;' for we have a blessing that the publican had not. Jesus has died; and we may plead before God His merits and mediation. God is 'just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus.' The way is open, the ground of acceptance is sure.

Beware of proud prayers, heartless prayers, prayerless prayers—prayers with no sorrow for sin, no sense of need, no real asking of God. How much we want! Yet not more than God is willing to give. Just as we are, in all our nakedness and need, let us go continually to the throne of grace. The Advocate is there before us, the all-prevailing Advocate. He died, He lives, for us. We need not stand afar off. Through Him we may draw near, and come boldly to the throne of grace.

SERMON XX.

LYDIA.

Acrs, xvi. 14.—'And a certain woman named Lydia, a seller of purple, of the city of Thyatira, which worshipped God, heard us; whose heart the Lord opened, that she attended unto the things which were spoken of Paul.'

PHILIPPI, where this happened, was a heathen city, but there were some Jews in it; not all of them Jews by birth, but probably a considerable number Jews by religion only—proselytes, as they were called—that is, people of other nations who had embraced the Jewish religion.

The Jewish women of Philippi were accustomed on the Sabbath to go out of the city to the river-side for prayer. There they were out of hearing of the din and bustle of the town, and might worship the one true God undisturbed.

When Paul and his companions were at Philippi, they went on the Sabbath to the river-side, and sat down there and spoke to the women. Among them that day was Lydia. She was not one of the inhabitants of Philippi. Her home was at Thyatira, a town in Asia Minor, a long way off; but she was staying at Philippi at that time, most likely for purposes of trade, for she was 'a seller of purple,' that is, a dealer in purple dye, or in the garments of that colour then much worn. She was a Jewess by religion, though not perhaps by birth; and probably she was a devout and serious person, being among these praying women.

She heard Paul's words with the rest. There was much in them that was new to her, and much that was contrary to her old opinions and prejudices; nevertheless she listened with attention, and the words she heard reached her heart. The Lord opened her heart, 'that she attended unto the things spoken of Paul.' She was convinced of the truth of the gospel, believed in Jesus Christ whom Paul preached, and was baptized in His name, with her household. She then at once joined herself to the Christians, and begged Paul and his companions to take up their abode in her house

Perhaps they were unwilling at first to burden her, for it is said that she 'constrained' them. But she would take no denial; so anxious was she to do them honour, and to help them in their work, for their Master's sake.

This is the story of Lydia. It is very short and simple; yet it contains important lessons.

I. Let us observe first, that though she was engaged in business, and also at this time away from home, vet she did not neglect religious duties. Some people make both or either of these things an excuse for doing so. One person says that when business presses upon him less heavily, then he will begin to attend to religion, but that at present he has neither time nor thought for it; business must be minded. Another, who pays a decent attention to religion when he is at home, so far at least as not to neglect its outward ordinances, seems to leave his religion behind him when he goes abroad. At home he has a character to maintain; abroad, he need not, he thinks, be so particular. Lydia's religion, even before she was a Christian, was not of this sort. Here we find her, though far from home, and though she had come to this very place on business, yet meeting with the other women for prayer on the Sabbath.

II. It was while she was thus employed that a spiritual blessing came to her. If she had not been there, she would have missed that opportunity of hearing Paul; and if she had not heard him then, perhaps she would not have heard him at all. And if she had never heard him, she might not ever have heard the gospel from other lips, and might never have had her heart opened to receive the truth. It was in the use of means that she received the blessing.

We are never so likely to receive a blessing as when we are using the means which God has given us. God can bless at any time, and even neglecters of the means of grace do sometimes receive grace. But these are cases which it would be dangerous and presumptuous to follow; for we have no reason to expect a blessing which we do not seek. Generally God, who gives us the means of grace, and bids us use them, blesses us in their use. He who prays, reads his Bible, frequents the house of God, and seeks Him in every ap-

pointed way, he is the person who is likely to be taught and blessed by God.

III. The Lord opened her heart. But for this, Lydia might have gone out to the place of prayer, and listened attentively to what Paul said, and yet have returned in just the same state as that in which she went.

'Whose heart the Lord opened.' What a striking expression! The door of her heart was closed before. The word might be heard by her, and heard with interest and pleasure: but it could not reach the heart, because the heart was shut against it. Lord by His Holy Spirit opened her heart, and then all was changed; then light and truth found entrance; then she drank in eagerly what she heard, and every word seemed true; then came conviction of sin; then she began to apply the preaching to herself; then she saw in Jesus one mighty to save. Not only was she convinced in her mind that Jesus was the Christ, but she believed on Him with the heart, and received Him as a Saviour for herself. Happy Lydia, to hear 'the joyful sound!'-happy, to have her heart opened to receive the glad tidings!

It was not for nothing that she went out that day to the river-side. Perhaps many a past prayer was answered that day; many a doubt, it may be, was cleared up, and many a longing desire satisfied, when her heart was opened to know Christ as her Saviour. Never could she forget that place and that day.

We all stand in need of this opening of the heart. Many hear the preaching of the Gospel for years, and hear it with interest and pleasure, and yet remain unchanged in heart. There they sit, Sunday after Sunday, in the accustomed seat; they are seldom absent when the house of prayer is open; they are constant hearers. How is it that so little effect is pro-How is it that they are still unduced? changed? Perhaps they have never even seen the need of the Lord opening their hearts, and of the Holy Spirit bringing home to them what they hear. We do not know whether Lydia had ever felt this need; but we enjoy more light than she had. We have been taught again and again the need of the Spirit's work in the heart; whereas she probably, like the disciples at Ephesus, had 'not so much as heard whether there be any Holy Ghost.'*

^{*} Acts, xix. 2.

Have we felt this need? Have we asked the Lord to open our hearts? Have we prayed for the Spirit? No sermon should ever be listened to without some such prayer. If we would either hear or read with profit to our souls, never let us open the Bible, or go up to the house of God, without beseeching Him to open our hearts to receive His word.

The Lord alone can do this. It was He who opened Lydia's heart; it is to Him we must look to open ours. But for this, even Paul might have preached in vain. It is not the eloquence of the preacher—his clear statements, convincing arguments, or touching appeals—that can cause the truth to reach the heart. This is the work of the Spirit alone. Gifts are valuable; powers of mind, and a persuasive tongue may be made highly useful in God's service; but preachers and hearers alike should never forget that all real success depends on the Lord opening the heart. Those are but outward means and instruments; the power is His alone.

How differently does one hear, when the heart has thus been unlocked! He attends perhaps the same church, and hears the same preacher. Yet all seems changed. It is as

though a veil had been removed from his eyes. Now he sees things which were all dark to him before. Now his heart and conscience feel deeply the very truths which used to have no meaning to him. Now the words of Scripture seem as if addressed to him in person. the sinner who is declared to be verily guilty. He is the person to whom the promise of pardon through the blood of Jesus is made. comforts, the encouragements, the hopes and assurances of the gospel seem now just suited to his need, and sent expressly to cheer him. What is it that makes this change? Bible is unaltered, the ministry is the same. The change is in himself. The Lord has opened his heart.

IV. Lastly, this was not a mere passing feeling in Lydia, but a real change. She was a Christian from that day—a true Christian, believing, and showing the fruits of her faith. She was at once baptized, and became at once the zealous friend of Paul and his companions.

With what humility she speaks! 'If ye have judged me to be faithful to the Lord.' Here is no loud profession, but a humble, almost timid, claim to be owned as a believer,

just suited to one only lately brought to the knowledge of Christ.

What kindness and love she shows to those who have been the means of bringing her so great a blessing! She felt what she owed to them, and would take no denial; they must lodge with her while they stayed at Philippi. She loved them for the good news they had brought her; she loved them for their Master's sake; and, in helping them, she did what she could to further the gospel. Surely her kindness was accepted by Him who will say hereafter, 'Verily, I say unto you, inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me.'*

She was not afraid of taking part with Paul and the other Christians, even in the face of danger. For danger there was. She must have known well how the Jews hated them, and how ready the heathen were to rise against them. This was soon after shown clearly, when Paul and Silas were beaten and thrown into prison. Yet Lydia was content to cast in her lot with the people of God.

Thus, as far as opportunity was given, she showed every sign of a true change.

^{*} Matt. xxv. 40.

And this is the test with us all. One who is a hearer only will show no fruit in his life. But one whose heart the Lord has opened will certainly be a different man from that time. The word will be a living word in him; living, and bringing forth fruit. That which he has heard on Sunday he will carry forth with him to his Monday's work, and strive to live by it all the week, and to act it out in all things. He will show himself a changed person, a new creature, 'created in Christ Jesus unto good works.'*

So may it be with us. May we all have such proof as this that our hearts have been opened by the Lord to receive His word! And may our whole life and conversation show whose we are, and whom we serve!

^{*} Eph. ii. 10.

SERMON XXI.

SATAN DENYING THE WORD OF GOD.

GEN. iii. 4.—' And the serpent said unto the woman, Ye shall not surely die.'

This is a sad chapter, the saddest perhaps in the whole Bible. For it tells us of the fall of man; of sin entering into the world, and death by sin. It is a tale of loss, and sorrow, and ruin. And it ends with our first parents being driven out from that happy place in which they had lived till then, never to return there again, but thenceforth to labour for their daily bread until they should return to the dust from which they were taken.

How did this sad change arise? All from denying, disbelieving, and disobeying the Word of God. God had said, 'Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat: but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof, thou shalt surely die.' The evil one, coming to Eve in the form of a serpent, gave the lie to this word of God; 'Ye shall not surely die.' The woman listened to the tempter's voice, the word of God was no longer regarded, and she and the man did eat of the forbidden tree.

Which proved true, the word of God or the word of Satan? Let the state of the world for these six thousand years answer the question. No sooner was the deed done than its consequences began to be felt. Then came a guilty conscience, a strangeness towards God, labour, sickness, and death. From that moment death lay before Adam and Eve; in due time they died; and, ever since, the whole race of man has been subject to death. The word of God came true. It always must come true.

The same evil work which Satan did in the case of our first parents, he is engaged in to this very day: it is still one of his chief aims to lead men to disbelieve the word of God.

I. With regard to the Bible as a whole, Satan's object is to throw discredit on it. In

the case of Adam and Eve, the word of God was the spoken word, that is, what God had said to them. In our case the word of God is the written word, the scriptures; written at different times and by different men, but all inspired by God. In various ways, suited to different minds, and to different states of thought and of knowledge, the evil one tries to do away with the authority of the Bible. To Eve he said boldly, 'Ye shall not surely die,' in direct opposition to what God had declared; and sometimes he still dares to give the lie to scripture, and tempts men to think it altogether false. But often his plan is more craftv. He seeks to lead the mind into a state of doubt and confusion. The Bible is a good book: that he does not venture to deny, lest he should show his object too plainly. But he suggests to the mind difficulties and objections of various kinds. Inspiration, for instance, what is it, and how far does it go, and how can we be sure of it? Though the Bible may be true as a whole, yet are there not parts which are not true? And even if true, are we not to look upon much as allegorical and figurative, and not simply true? Who can tell what is to be taken simply, and

what figuratively? How can this doctrine be reconciled with that? Is not such and such a statement against all our notions? Can we believe that God would do this or that?

Some of these doubts and questions may seem, at first sight, to have little, if anything, wrong in them. They may even be praised by some as honest and free enquiry. But when, not a humble and teachable, but a sceptical spirit prompts them, it is not hard to perceive whence they come. They are not from above, but from below. Anything that tends to lead away from a simple belief in the word of God must be evil. It is a device of Satan to ensnare souls; as dangerous a device as that which he used with Eve, when he said, 'Ye shall not surely die;' perhaps even more dangerous, because more subtle.

- II. Satan pursues the same object with regard to particular truths of the Bible. His aim is to make men disbelieve what God has said.
- 1. For instance, the word of God declares that God sees all, and hears all, and is everywhere present. 'The eyes of the Lord are in every place, beholding the evil and the good.'

'There is not a word in my tongue, but, lo, O Lord, thou knowest it altogether.' The tempter seeks to make men disbelieve this. 'And they say, How doth God know? Is there knowledge in the Most High?' At least he strives to lead men to forget it, for there are many who dare not deny the truths of Scripture, and yet live in constant forgetfulness of them. And when God is forgotten—His all-seeing eye, His all-hearing ear, His presence everywhere—then the sinner goes on in his own way, and Satan's object is gained.

2. Again, the Bible declares endless misery to be the portion of impenitent sinners. It speaks of 'the second death,' and of 'eternal death,' and of the worm that dieth not, and the fire that is not quenched. And nothing can be plainer than those awful words of our Lord, 'These shall go away into everlasting punishment; but the righteous into life eternal.'*

But many will not receive this truth. The sinner tries to disbelieve it; and some even who reverence the word of God do not humbly bow to what it says on this point. Eternal

^{*} Matt. xxv. 46.

misery, they say, means something less than eternal. How vain is this! Eternal happiness and eternal misery rest on the same word. If the punishment of the lost could be proved to be less than everlasting, that very argument must shorten also the happiness of the saved. If 'for ever' means less than for ever in the one case, it must do so in the other too. cares not what it is that is set up in opposition to the word of God, so long as it is in opposition,—the natural pride of the heart, the vanity of learning, or the mind's instinctive shrinking from a fearful doom lying before If Satan can lead men to believe what they presumptuously think God ought to have said, rather than what God has said, his end is gained: and this way of thinking seems often to lie at the root of a doubt about eternal punishment. There are many doubters, who little suspect from whom their doubts come. Yet a denial of the eternity of punishment bears a striking likeness to the words of the evil one to Eve, 'Ye shall not surely die.' For, in the face of the words of our Lord. 'These shall go away into everlasting punishment,' men are led to comfort themselves thus, 'Ye shall not surely die;' this punishment is not eternal, it is but for a time.

These are a few of the ways in which Satan still carries on his work of denying the word of God.

He is constantly engaged in this work. 'When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own; for he is a liar, and the father of it.' On the other hand, 'He that is of God heareth God's words.' Our Lord places the two in direct opposition.* Satan contradicts the word of God; the child of God hears, believes, and obeys it. Yet the child of God must watch and pray against an enemy so crafty and so powerful. 'I fear,' writes St. Paul to the Corinthians, 'lest by any means, as the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtlety, so your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ-or towards Christ.'† Satan strives to make men disbelieve the promises, as well as the threatenings of God; and seeks, not only to lull the sinner to sleep in unbelief and forgetfulness, but also to cloud the gospel in the hearts of believers, and to turn the inquiring soul from a simple faith in Christ

^{*} John, viii. 44, 47.

^{+ 2} Cor. xi. 3.

into a trust in forms and ceremonies and outward things. In all points he shows himself as the denier and opposer of the word of God.

But the Bible is true, all true. Its promises and its threatenings, its history and its doctrines, all rest on the same footing; it is the word of God. We may not receive one part, and reject another. If we do not receive its warnings, neither may we take comfort from its promises. If we refuse to believe it when it speaks of 'the terror of the Lord,' then we have no right to apply to ourselves its declarations of mercy. The Bible is one. It comes from one God, it is written by one inspiration, it speaks one unchangeable truth. Once doubt that it is true, absolutely and certainly true; and it can no longer be, what it is to all who receive it, a lamp to our feet and a light to our path.

Thanks be to God, the Bible does not leave us where this chapter places us. The word of God which tells us of *death*, speaks also of *life*. The book of Genesis tells us how man fell, the gospel shows us restoration and life. Satan lied when he said, 'Ye shall *not* surely die.' But, wonderful to say, the gospel now declares the very same thing, and declares it *truly*. For the Restorer has come, the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ; and by Him the curse is removed, guilt is taken away, man is reconciled to God, and life eternal is bestowed. by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive.' All who are in Christ by faith do even now live spiritually; and, though they must pass through death (unless the Lord should first come), yet Jesus has robbed death of its terrors, and made it to His people the gate of everlasting life; for them there is no second death, no death of the soul; they are safe in Him. As surely as every child of Adam is subject to death, so surely will every one who is born again, and has thus become a child of God, inherit eternal life.

But only the true believer has a part in this salvation. There must be a living faith, a real repentance, a true work of the Spirit. There must be a belief with the heart in the Lord Jesus Christ; and none will really believe in Him, but those who do also believe what the word of God declares about sin, and ruin, and death. The gospel says, 'Ye shall not surely die.' But to whom? To those only who

feel that they are spiritually dead, and look to Christ for life. The disease must be felt, ere the cure can be had; and it is only when a man knows himself a lost and ruined sinner, that he will look to Jesus as mighty to save.

SERMON XXII.

QUENCHING THE SPIRIT.

1 THESS. v. 19 .- 'Quench not the Spirit.'

ALL God's gifts, both temporal and spiritual, may be used either rightly or wrongly. He gives us life; we may either waste it, or spend it well. He gives us talents; we may use them either for good or for evil. He gives us the offers of the gospel; we may reject them. He gives us His Holy Spirit; but the Holy Spirit may be quenched. For though it may not be, that a true and saving work of grace in the soul can finally be destroyed, yet the promptings of the Spirit may be resisted, and His sanctifying power crossed and opposed. We should not find this exhortation, 'Quench not the Spirit,' unless it might be

done, and unless there were a danger of doing it.

What is meant then by quenching the Spirit?

The work of the Spirit is in the heart. There He touches the conscience, convinces of sin, moves the feelings, applies the word of God, and leads to Christ and to holiness. Now quenching is doing anything to stop or hinder this work. It is a figure of speech, taken from the quenching of fire. Water will quench fire, either by putting it out, or by making it burn less brightly. Dust or rubbish thrown on will have the same effect. In like manner may we quench the Spirit; and that in various ways. Let us consider some of them.

1. By grieving Him. The Apostle writes to the Ephesians, 'Grieve not the Holy Spirit of God.'* The Spirit is grieved, when we sin against conscience, indulge wilfully in any evil habit, or do at any time what we know to be wrong. This was the charge against Israel; 'But they rebelled, and vexed his Holy Spirit: therefore he was turned to be their enemy, and he fought against them.'† This is

^{*} Eph. iv. 30.

⁺ Isa. lxviii. 10.

a sure way of quenching the Spirit. God said of old, 'My Spirit shall not always strive with man.'* When the Spirit is grieved by wilful sin, the conscience becomes blunted, impressions first become dim, and then fade away altogether, and the Spirit at length ceases to strive.

- 2. By neglecting Him. The promptings of the Spirit in the heart are to be diligently attended to, the inward voice is to be listened to and obeyed. We should welcome the Spirit, watch for His presence, and submit ourselves to His leading. Otherwise we quench the Spirit by indifference and neglect.
- 3. By worldliness of mind. The work of the Spirit is in the heart. But if the heart be filled with the world, there is no room for the workings of the Spirit. Or if the love of the world be suffered to regain a hold upon those who have received the Spirit, then His work is smothered and quenched, as fire is by water or rubbish. This effect may be produced by the world in any shape—by gain, pleasure, folly, by too great keenness about even lawful

^{*} Gen. vi. 3.

things, and even by human affections unduly indulged. In every heart there should be room left for the Spirit—the *chief* place—or the Spirit is quenched. Alas, in how many hearts is the Spirit thus quenched by the world!

4. By a want of watchfulness. If a Christian has found anything to interfere with his spirituality of mind—any amusement, any company, any pursuit, any book, any train of thought—he must watch against that thing especially. Otherwise he quenches the Spirit. If he lives generally in an unwatchful way, as if there were no snares around him, not keeping guard within and without, then again the Spirit is quenched, and His gracious work is checked.

How often, at the close of the day, when we kneel down for our evening prayer, and think over all we have done and said and thought, how often are we humbled because we have quenched the Spirit through unwatchfulness. We began the day with true and earnest prayer. In the early morning, before entering on the duties of the day, we committed ourselves to God, and sought His grace and guidance. We prayed; but afterwards per-

haps we forgot to watch. And so, when some sudden temptation came, it prevailed against us, and we fell. We spoke unchristian words, or harboured a wrong feeling, or followed an evil example, or were ashamed of Christ, or gave way to folly. Thus the Spirit was quenched, our peace was broken, and our walk with God was interrupted; and we find at the end of the day a ruffled mind, and a special need of pardoning mercy.

5. By spiritual idleness. I mean by this, backwardness in prayer, and neglect of the Bible and the other means of grace. God usually works by means; and the Holy Spirit is promised in answer to prayer. But if we neglect prayer, we do, as it were, stop up the channel by which the Spirit would come to us. Thus we quench the Spirit.

Such are some of the ways, but by no means all, in which the Spirit may be quenched. Perhaps conscience may recall others to the mind.

This is not a thing of small importance. In quenching the Spirit, we do ourselves much evil, and bring on ourselves great loss.

For thus we lose spirituality of mind, and 'to be spiritually minded is life and peace.'* The spiritual mind is that mind in which the Spirit dwells. If the Spirit be quenched, this indwelling is lost, or injured.

We lose also the sense of acceptance. 'The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit that we are the children of God, and if children, then heirs; heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ.' † But this too is lost, if the Spirit be quenched. There is no inward witness then.

In like manner, when the Spirit is quenched, spiritual growth is stopped, for growth is the Spirit's work. The heart becomes cold and dead. It no longer feels, and melts, and loves. There is no nearness to God, no love of His word, no warmth in prayer.

Let those who have already experienced the work of the Spirit, beware of quenching the Spirit. Have not your best and happiest times been those in which you have walked in the Spirit? Cherish the Spirit then. Let no sinful indulgence, no neglect of His voice, no love of the world, no careless walking, no slothfulness, be suffered to hinder the inward work. As you value spiritual comfort, as you desire

^{*} Rom. viii. 6.

⁺ Rom. viii. 16, 17.

spiritual progress, beware of quenching the Spirit.

Many are not conscious of any work of the Spirit in their hearts. Yet the Spirit may have begun to work there. Have you ever convictions of sin, an uneasy feeling that all is not right with your soul, some faint desire after better things,-fears, misgivings, apprehensions? Do not try to stifle these feelings, or fly to the world for relief, lest in so doing you should be quenching the Spirit. may be the strivings of the Spirit within your heart, the pleadings of God with you, to lead you to Himself. Cherish them, yield to them, pray over them. Your greatest misery would be, to succeed in driving away all serious thoughts, and to go on in your own way unchecked and undisturbed. For then the Spirit would have left you. Your highest happiness would be, to listen to the still small voice, to follow that gracious guidance, to draw near to God, to seek and to find Christ the Saviour. May this happiness be yours.

SERMON XXIII.

SUBJECTS OF A NEW KING.

Col. i. 13.—'Who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son.'

The people to whom the Apostle wrote had been heathen, but were now Christians. This was the change of which he spoke. While heathen, they were subjects of the power of darkness; in a state of blindness, sin, and death. But now they were subjects of Christ, and partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light. It was a great and wonderful change, for which he heartily thanked God, praying at the same time that they might go on to a further knowledge of Him and of His will, and increase in holiness and fruitfulness.

Alas! the power of darkness has many subjects still, and that not in heathen lands alone, where they may be reckoned by hundreds of millions, but in Christian countries too. There are numbers who are Christians in nothing but the name—bearing the name of Jesus, but not believing in Him, loving Him, or serving Him. These nominal Christians are still subject to the power of darkness, though light is all around them. They need a change -the very change mentioned in the text. They need to be delivered from the power of darkness, and to be translated into the kingdom of God's dear Son. The difference between them and the heathen seems indeed to be great, and so it is in many respects: but they yet need that very change which the heathen also need—a change of heart, to be turned from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God.

It concerns us greatly to know whether this change has taken place in us, or not. This is a deep, personal question, compared with which all other questions are trifling indeed. There is no middle state: each person is a subject either of the power of darkness, or of the kingdom of God's dear Son. Which are we?

Here are some marks by which we may know:—

- 1. Do we no longer love the works of darkness? The Apostle speaks of it as a deliverance, to be set free from the power of darkness. Is it thus that we regard it? And have we been so set free? It is not yet indeed a perfect deliverance, for sin still cleaves to us. But do we no longer love sin? Is it our desire, our endeavour, and our prayer, to be freed from it? Do we resist temptation? Do we watch and pray? Do we mourn when we fall? Vain is all knowledge, and empty all profession, if the works of darkness be loved and followed still. Such a person is too surely no subject of Christ's kingdom.
- 2. But there are persons of decent and steady character, who would shrink from the thought of being subject to the power of darkness, and who, in truth, are very different in their lives from gross and open sinners. Let us try them then by another test. For this we need not look beyond the next verse; 'In whom we have redemption through His blood, even the forgiveness of sins.' Now, can we

say that? All Christ's subjects are bound to Him by this tie—they are redeemed by His blood, forgiven for His sake. Have we this proof that we are His? Have we learnt the preciousness of the blood of Jesus, our need of it, its freeness, and its fullness? Do we believe on Him with the heart? Surely one who feels no need of Christ, and has no faith in Him, and is not a partaker of His redemption, is not yet translated into His kingdom, though he may bear His name.

3. Another mark is the state of the affections. Christ's kingdom is not like other kingdoms: it is a government not over countries merely, but over hearts. And this change, spoken of in the text, is a change of heart. What then is the state of our hearts? What do we feel towards Christ? Does this very expression awaken any emotion in us, 'His dear Son,' the Son of His love? Is He dear to us? Have we any love to Him? All who are true subjects of this King love Him; do we? Not as we would, I am sure. But do we love Him? If not, this is a sad sign that we are not yet subjects of His kingdom.

4. But a subject lives by the regulations of the kingdom to which he belongs, submits himself to its government, and obeys its laws. Do we obey the laws of Christ's kingdom? Do we submit ourselves to the gospel? Do we strive to rule our lives by the Word of God? 'This is the love of God, that we keep his commandments: and his commandments are not grievous.' * Have we this mark of being Christ's, that the commandments of God are not grievous to us? Greatly as we fall short of keeping them, yet do we approve of them, and love them? Is it our heart's desire to obey and please our king? Do we 'hunger and thirst after righteousness?' See what St. Paul's desire was for the Colossians: 'That ye might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God.' (v. 10.) Is that what we wish and pray for? Are our hearts set upon serving our Lord, and doing His will? Here is another mark of Christ's subjects—a mark which we shall certainly have, if we are really His?

Honest self-examination must always humble us, for we cannot but discover much of sin

^{* 1} John, v. 3.

and corruption in our hearts and lives, many shortcomings in our duty, much mixture of evil in our motives. Yet, if we do find in ourselves scriptural marks of being subjects of Christ, let us not refuse to own them. Do we no longer love sin, or wilfully follow it? Is our faith fixed upon Christ our Redeemer? Do we love Him, however feebly? Is it our desire and prayer that we may do His will? What are these, but so many marks that we are His? We cannot doubt that this is of grace, the work of the Spirit. We need not fear to own these marks: there is no selfrighteousness in doing so, for it is His work, He wrought the change, He delivered us, He translated us. If we feel sadly our many shortcomings and inconsistencies, we should but pray the more. Paul prayed for the Colossians, in the same breath in which he thanked God for their conversion. So let us pray, thankfully owning the work of grace, while we beg that it may be still carried on; praising and praying together.

But can you find no such marks? Where are you then, and whose are you? There is no middle kingdom, nothing between the power of darkness and the kingdom of Christ. How

awful a state, with eternity near! Yet still deliverance may be had. He who has delivered, can deliver. Jesus is still mighty to save, ready to save. 'Whom we preach, warning every man, and teaching every man in all wisdom.' (v. 28.) But for how long? Each warning voice may be the last, each call may be the closing call. Will you put off still? Will you run the risk of dying, undelivered, untranslated, the subject of the power of darkness, and doomed therefore to be so for ever and ever? May God forbid.

SERMON XXIV.

COMPANIONS IN TRIBULATION.

1 Pet. v. 9.—'Whom resist, stedfast in the faith, knowing that the same afflictions are accomplished in your brethren that are in the world.'

We are naturally inclined to think our own trials and temptations greater than those of others, because, being our own, we know them better and feel them more deeply. Many a sufferer thinks there are no sufferings like his, and many a person when tempted to sin supposes that his temptations are quite peculiar. But this is not true. Whatever trials we may have, there are probably other people who are suffering much the same; the temptations that beset us are felt by many beside us, and doubtless some are tempted even more than we have ever yet been.

Now this thought helps us to bear temptation. It is not, as we were inclined to suppose, some new and strange thing that has befallen us. We are not alone in what we suffer. We have many fellow-sufferers, fellow-travellers, fellow-soldiers. We do but form parts of one great whole. This is a helpful thought, and as such it seems to be set before us in the text, 'Whom resist, stedfast in the faith, knowing that the same afflictions are accomplished in your brethren that are in the world.'

1. The person meant by this word 'whom,' is the devil, the enemy of souls, spoken of in the verse before, 'Because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour.' We are told to resist him. This is the way in which we are always to meet him. He makes his attacks in various ways; sometimes by open assault, sometimes by secret snare; now in the form of outward temptation, now in that of inward suggestion. He seeks occasion against us in our moments of weakness. He strives to lead us into sin, unbelief, doubt, fear, self-confidence. He has a thousand weapons against the soul. But all are to be met with resistance; 'whom resist.'

He is an enemy, a deadly enemy. We must not yield, but resist.

2. Yet not in our own strength, or we shall certainly fall. 'Whom resist, stedfast in the faith.' Satan desired to have Peter and his brother apostles, that he might sift them as wheat. Jesus prayed for him, that his faith might not fail. But Peter was self-confident, and thought he could stand in his own strength. What was the consequence? He fell grievously, and was restored by sovereign grace alone.' Doubtless he was permitted to fall, that he might learn this lesson, 'Whom resist, stedfast in the faith. And now we find Peter himself teaching, by inspiration, the same lesson to us and all.

'Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall.' 'When I am weak, then am I strong.' The first step towards strength is to know our weakness. We are to be stedfast, not in self but in faith; confident in God, relying upon His promises, His wisdom, power, and love. We are to meet temptation in such a spirit as this—feeling sure that all temptation, and Satan himself, the author of it, is completely subject to God; not doubting that

He will help us in answer to prayer; holding fast by Him through all, even though there be no token of His presence; and still exercising faith in Him, though nothing may seem to be near but difficulties and enemies.

3. This is not easy. No indeed. Our enemy is strong; and though our Friend is mightier than he, yet our faith is often weak. But we are not alone, even as regards human companions. We have fellow-sufferers, though unknown by us. There are those whom the enemy is attacking as he is attacking us. There is a great brotherhood in Christ dispersed throughout the world, and the same afflictions are being accomplished in them as in us.

Take the case of a young man or woman, wishing to serve God, yet placed by circumstances among ungodly companions, and surrounded by temptations. It is not an uncommon case. Perhaps such a person may hear or read these words. You have none like-minded with yourself, you seem to stand alone. Yet you are *not* alone. God is near. And besides, in that great Christian brotherhood of which I spoke, there are numbers who are

circumstanced as you are. Not to speak of other kinds of temptations and trials, unlike your own, and yet as hard to bear, there are in the world numbers of young persons like yourself exposed to the very same temptations as you are exposed to. They too are living among the careless and ungodly; they too have to face opposition, dislike, and ridicule; and they too perhaps have fears and apprehensions, and feelings of loneliness and depression, such as you suffer from. You do not see them. or know them; it may happen perhaps that there is not one such person among your personal acquaintance. Yet there are such, living in the same world as you, fighting the same battle, suffering the same temptations, upheld by the same strength. Many such have already finished their course, and gone to their rest. Many others are still resisting, stedfast in the faith. They are your brethren, though you know them not, your fellowtravellers in the journey of life, your companions in tribulation. You may be with them in spirit. The thought of them may give you a feeling of companionship. You are not alone. The same afflictions are accomplished in your brethren that are in the world.

4. And over all is the same gracious eye. If Christians form one brotherhood, it is because they are children of one Father. God is their Father in Christ Jesus, and they are His children by adoption and grace. They see not one another, but He sees them all. are not acquainted with each other's temptations and trials, but He knows all. There is not one tried and tempted disciple, whom He does not see, and know, and care for. Their Friend is mightier than their foe. Every moment His eye is upon them for good. Even in the sharpest trial, and in the most severe temptation. He is near. The warfare will not be for ever. Even here there will be seasons of rest. 'Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.' And at length there will be perfect and eternal rest and glory. 'But the God of all grace. who hath called us unto his eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after that ye have suffered awhile, make you perfect, stablish, strengthen, settle you.'

Let none, therefore, despond under temptation. Let none yield to the assaults of the evil one. It would be misery and ruin to yield; but in resisting there is strength, comfort, victory, and peace. Temptation yielded to is sin; temptation resisted and overcome is victory. It is God's command that we should resist; it is God's promise that we shall overcome. He will make us more than conquerors through Him who loved us. No cross, no crown; no battle, no victory. 'We must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God.'

But look on beyond the tribulation, and see what will follow. 'These are they which came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. Therefore are they before the throne of God, and serve Him day and night in His temple; and He that sitteth on the throne shall dwell among them. They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more: neither shall the sun light on them, nor any heat. For the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall feed them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of waters, and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes.'*

They who are now companions in tribulation, will be companions in glory then.

^{*} Rev. vii. 14-17.

SERMON XXV.

PAUL AT ROME.

Acrs, xxviii. 24.—' And some believed the things which were spoken, and some believed not.'

It was as a prisoner that Paul arrived at Rome; and as a prisoner he lived there. It might be thought that no circumstances could be more unfavourable for preaching the gospel; yet never perhaps did he do so much for his Master as during his stay in that city. Many of his Epistles were written there, and he preached there freely to high and low.

Let none say, 'I have no opening, circumstances are at present against me, I can do nothing.' We are not so much the creatures of circumstances as is often supposed. A zealous heart is not easily hindered by outward things.

God can turn any circumstances to the furtherance of His work.

Wherever Paul went, whether to Rome or elsewhere, and in whatever circumstances He was placed—favoured or persecuted, a prisoner or free—he proclaimed Christ. This was his work, his aim, that which he lived for. It ought to do us good, to read of so devoted a life, such singleness of heart and purpose. This was to live indeed.

No sooner then had he reached Rome than Three days after his arrival, he he began. called together the chief of the Jews, to see them and speak with them, and to tell them that it was 'for the hope of Israel,' that is, for Jesus Christ, that he was a prisoner. Then, on an appointed day, many came to him, 'to whom he expounded and testified the kingdom of God, persuading them concerning Jesus, both out of the law of Moses, and out of the prophets, from morning till evening.' Not that they were promising hearers. Far from it. For they began by saying, 'As concerning this sect [the body of Christians], we know that everywhere it is spoken against.' But he was not discouraged by this from setting forth Christ to them.

What was the result? We read it in the text; 'Some believed the things which were spoken, and some believed not.'

It is probable that most, if not all, of those who are here said to have believed, believed really. Not only was their understanding convinced that Jesus was the Messiah, but their hearts received Him as such. Most likely they at once joined themselves to the Apostle as disciples of Christ.

But the rest believed not; and perhaps from this time they were more decided than ever against the gospel. And so the prophecy of Isaiah was fulfilled in them, 'Hearing ye shall hear, and shall not understand: and seeing ye shall see, and not perceive.' These were probably more in number than those who believed; for, from that time, Paul began to preach to the Gentiles at Rome, as though the great body of the Jews there had rejected the gospel. It was in fact the turning point. The offer was made, and was either accepted or refused. It was a great division. Some believed, and some believed not.

In this account we read of what happened in a distant country eighteen hundred years ago. Yet the very same thing is now taking place among us continually. Whatever difference there is, it is chiefly, if not wholly, in the circumstances, not in the thing itself.

Christ is still proclaimed as the Saviour of Jew and Gentile. The very same gospel as Paul preached is preached among us. The same Saviour whom he that day set forth to the Jews at Rome, is set forth to us continually. Through all the ages since, that same gospel has never ceased to be preached,-that one blessed, saving, gospel. It has been hated, opposed, corrupted; but never lost. In every age there have been those who held it, prized it, and preached it. As in the days of Elijah, when true religion seemed almost extinct, there were yet seven thousand in Israel who clave to God, so in the darkest times of the Church, there have been some true Christians and some faithful preachers. That very same gospel is still proclaimed. There is nothing new in it. We want nothing new. We hear the same glad tidings again and again. They cannot be heard too often. Not too often by those who believe, for they are their joy and stay. Not too often by those who believe not, for they need still to have 'line upon line,' if so be they may at length believe unto salvation.

The great question with us all is, whether we believe or not. All who hear the gospel are classed thus; those who believe, and those who believe not. There is no middle class. There is nothing between.

I said that whatever difference there is between the case of those Jewish hearers and our own, is mainly a difference of circumstances, There is a difference; for they were divided, not only with regard to a saving faith, but even as to outward belief, some believing that Jesus was the Christ, and some not. We on the contrary are all agreed on that point. The point of division among us is, whether there be a heart-belief in Christ, or not. In this sense, some believe, and some do not believe. And these two classes make up the whole of every congregation, and comprise all hearers and readers of the gospel. There are none who do not belong to the one class or the other.

In the judgment of Him who knows every heart, all hearers and all readers are divided thus. They may sit side by side, and listen to the same words. But oh! the vast difference in the sight of God! One believes, another does not believe. To one, Jesus is a Saviour, known, believed in, and loved. By another,

He is only heard of; not received, not embraced, not made *His own* by faith.

And this difference, this great division, is a difference which will last for ever, unless the unbeliever be brought to believe. It is, in fact, the very same difference as that between the wheat and the tares, the sheep and the goats; it is the difference between the saved and the not saved, between those who will be welcomed and those who will be shut out.

How is it with you? Do you believe, or do you not believe? Are you in doubt upon this point? Unwilling to say that you do not believe, are you yet afraid to say that you do? Do not leave so great a matter in doubt. If, with all your past attention to religion, your serious thoughts and deep impressions, you are still in doubt whether you have yet believed with the heart,—set that point at rest now. Make sure that from this time you do believe. Still the gospel comes to you. Still the Saviour offers Himself to you freely. Accept Him. Open your heart to receive Him. Believe in Him now. Approach Him, and say, 'Lord, I believe; help thou my unbelief!'

But are you careless about the subject, not much concerned as to whether you believe or not? Then certainly you do not believe. none who do are careless about it. sider what a state this is. Living in the midst of gospel light, again and again hearing of Jesus, yet not believing, and not even troubled by the thought that you do not believe. Will all these hearings and readings go for nothing? Paul turned from the unbelieving Jews, to preach the gospel to the Gentiles; are you running no risk of having that gospel which you will not believe taken away from you? It may seem to you a slight difference now, between believing and not believing. But what will you think of it in the day 'when the Son of man shall come in his glory, . . . and before him shall be gathered all nations; and he shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats: and he shall set the sheep on his right hand, but the goats on the left?'* Will the difference seem small then? Will you still be unconcerned? Oh! seek to be numbered now among them that believe in the Lord Jesus, that you may 'not be ashamed before him at his coming.'

* Matt. xxv. 31-33.

SERMON XXVI.

GOD DWELLING WITH THE CONTRITE.

Isa. Ivii. 15.—'For thus saith the high and lofty One, that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy, I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones.'

THERE is nothing more remarkable and peculiar in Scripture than its perfect suitability to our wants. It meets us in all our frames of mind, and adapts itself to all our circumstances. We never go to the Bible for guidance or comfort, without finding something to suit our case.

For instance, what can be more cheering to one who is *downcast* in heart, than these words of the text? They are just what he wants. No human words could so exactly meet his feelings. Considered even as mere words, they are full of comfort. How much more, when we think of them as the words of Goo!

Yet at first sight there seems something terrible here, rather than comforting. 'Thus saith the high and lofty One, that inhabiteth eternity.' God is here set forth in His greatness. Can such an one care for a man, a worm of the earth? The next words seem even more discouraging; 'whose name is Holy.' If holy, must He not be displeased with me, a sinner? Can I, unworthy as I am, hope to be looked upon with favour by the Holy God? Thus, to the humble and contrite, these opening words seem to bring anything but hope or comfort.

The same may be said of the words that follow, in which the Almighty begins to speak in His own person; 'I dwell in the high and holy place.' 'Ah, yes!' unbelief and despondency may reply, 'in the high and holy place; far out of my reach; in that high place to which I can never attain, in that holy place which such as I cannot enter.' To one cast down under a sense of sin, contrite, humble, and desponding, these words seem to place God at an infinite

distance, and to make Him indeed 'a God afar off.'*

But now mark what follows. See how these very feelings are met, and how God turns the impression of His power and holiness into a thought of comfort to the contrite. 'I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones.'

The greatness and holiness of God are here set forth, not to terrify, but to cheer. He, the high, the lofty, the eternal, 'whose name is Holy,' is not far off, but near. True, He dwells 'in the high and holy place,' in the heaven of heavens, where countless angels worship Him and do His bidding; but He dwells also with the contrite and humble soul. The high and holy place is not more the place of His abode than is the heart of the meek and contrite. The same word says that He inhabits both.

Take the case of some person deeply humbled under a sense of sin, conscience-stricken, truly penitent, earnestly desiring mercy, hardly daring to hope, yet still feebly looking to Christ. That poor downcast heart—what is

^{*} Jer. xxiii. 23.

it? The very palace of the King of kings! He dwells therein. He makes that humble heart the place of His abode. The eye of faith may be so dim that it cannot see Him, yet He is there. He says so; 'With him also that is of a humble and contrite spirit.' He does not say, 'With the holy and good.' He does not even say, 'With him who is strong in faith with him who is able to grasp the promises.' In His grace and mercy He comes down lower than this, and declares that He abides with the contrite and humble.

Is not this cheering? Does it not raise your drooping spirit, to be assured that God knows you, cares for you, dwells with you? And that —notwithstanding all your fears, your despondency, your conscious nothingness, your deep sense of unworthiness—yea, even because of them? Are you but contrite, humbled, casting away all self-righteousness and self-dependence, and trying to look to Jesus alone, then God is with you, the great and holy God. For He says that He dwells with the contrite, and by His grace you are such.

But the words that follow are more comforting still.

Why does God dwell with the contrite? For

what purpose, and with what effect? 'To revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones.' It is not His will that you should always go on as you are. He would have you always humble, but not always desponding; always contrite, but not always downcast. He comes to cheer you, to raise you from your despondency, to comfort and revive you. And that, not outwardly, but inwardly. To revive your spirit, your heart; just where your trouble lies, and where your despondency is felt. Those fears and misgivings which try you so greatly, He comes to take away. Those doubts of the reality of your religious impressions, those suspicions of your own sincerity, He comes to answer. He comes to speak to you by the Spirit pardon, hope, and peace; to encourage you in Christ; to lead you to know and embrace His love.

Do not refuse to be comforted. Shut not your heart against His gracious presence. Try to open every feeling and affection to welcome Him. Lay your sins on Jesus. Believe that He takes the burden from you. Listen to the voice of the Spirit speaking within you. Believe that God is with you, that He is watching over you, that He cares for you and wills your

happiness, that He is blessing, and will bless you.

What made the disciples in the boat afraid, though Jesus was with them? HE was there. whom winds and waves obey; no harm could happen to them while He was near; yet they were afraid, and cried out in their terror, 'Lord, save us; we perish!' Why did they fear? Because their faith was weak. They were safe, but they did not believe in their safety.* And you are safe, if you have cast in your lot with the Lord Jesus, as they had. will bless you, and keep you, and save you. Believe this. Though God has compassion on the weak in faith, and graciously gives them many a word of encouragement, yet be not satisfied with little faith. The Lord Jesus, though He helped the disciples, yet gently rebuked them, 'Why are ye fearful, O ye of little faith?' Aim at being strong in faith. Realise your Saviour's presence, power, and love. Trust Him fully. So you will be not only safe in Christ, but happy in Him too. So you will be able to look up continually to a reconciled Father, and to believe that He is with you. And even your deep sense of sin, and your

^{*} Matt. viii. 23-27.

strong self-reproaches, will not drive you from God, or make you doubt Him, but will rather draw you nearer to Him, as your only comfort, rest, and strength, your stronghold in the day of trouble.

And this comfort you may have, not only when downcast about spiritual things, but also under all troubles whatsoever. The humble and contrite, with whom God dwells, have in Him an unfailing friend. Many and various are the troubles of life. Many are the causes which make us anxious, fearful, and desponding. The believer may have recourse to God in them all. When family griefs or fears press heavily, or when friends are unkind; in sickness or weakness, in lowness of spirits; at times when a cloud seems to have come over all earthly prospects, and the joy of life seems gone, -at all such times the believer may cast his burden on the Lord, and find relief. No tongue can tell how God can comfort them that are cast down, what peace He can give to the troubled spirit, what rest, even now, to the weary. precious is prayer at such times! The soul draws near to God, and God draws near to it. The trouble, the fear, the secret thought or apprehension, is told to God; and, even in the act of telling it, an answer of comfort seems to come, and it is felt anew that the 'high and lofty One' does indeed dwell with the humble and contrite who seek Him.

The proud and self-righteous, the careless and impenitent, can know nothing of this. For these blessings are for the contrite, and for Yet the contrite were not always them alone. contrite, and the humble were once perhaps proud; it is grace that has changed them and brought them down. The same grace can change those who are now proud and careless. And this is the object of many of God's dealings with those who are at present far off from Him. Losses, disappointments, and trials; pain of body, and grief of mind; what are they in numberless instances? Judgments? No: mercies, mercies in disguise, the best and choicest of mercies, sent by the God of all long-suffering to bring down pride, and soften hardness, and lead the sufferer to CHRIST in penitence and faith; that so He may visit him, and dwell with him, and bless him, and cause him to know His love.

SERMON XXVII.

TRUE RELIGION, BOTH SPIRITUAL AND PRACTICAL.

Ps. ci. 2.—'I will behave myself wisely in a perfect way. O when wilt thou come unto me? I will walk within my house with a perfect heart.'

This is one of the Psalms of David, expressing his feelings, wishes, and purposes, when advanced to the throne of Israel. In this verse we are shown two things about the religion of the psalmist; we see that it was both spiritual and practical.

I. It was spiritual. 'O when wilt Thou come unto me?' he cries. These words express a longing desire for God's presence; and they are all the more striking from being introduced in the midst of another subject. He is declaring his

determination to behave himself wisely, when this wish breaks forth, 'O when wilt Thou come unto me?'

It is the sure mark of a spiritual mind to delight in the presence of God. To hold communion with Him in secret, to lift up the heart to Him and feel Him near, to place a happy confidence in Him as a Friend and Father—this is the delight and the desire of the child of God.

Nor is this a happiness which is beyond his reach. It is the privilege of the Christian to enjoy the presence of God. Christ, who is the living way, has brought him near. By Him the believer can approach the throne of grace, and seek God's presence in faith, and enjoy the fulfilment of the promise, 'My Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him.'

Yet there are changes in our frames and feelings. We do not always alike enjoy this blessing. Though God's presence itself may not be removed from us, yet the happy sense of it often is. We are not always bright; we have our dark days. The words of David, 'O when wilt Thou come unto me?' seem to show that at that time he himself was rather desiring than enjoying the presence of God. They seem

to express a temporary want of comfort. Yet they are words, not of despondency, but of ardent desire. This is the voice of one who has had the sense of God's presence in times past, and most earnestly seeks it again. The withholding of the blessing does but increase his desire for it; 'O when wilt Thou come unto me?'

Perhaps spiritual comfort is sometimes withheld by God, on purpose to quicken our desires and prayers; for we often value a blessing the more from its being withdrawn. Perhaps it is part of God's gracious dealing with us for our good, to hide from us at times the light of His countenance, that we may cry to Him the more earnestly, 'O when wilt Thou come unto me?' Let none then give way to despondency, when the sense of God's nearness is gone, and the brightness of His presence is dimmed; let none think that God is changed, that He has forgotten to be gracious, that He will visit and bless no more. Rather let more ardent desires be called forth, and let the cry go up more earnestly than ever, 'O when wilt Thou come unto me?' Pray without ceasing. Pray in faith. Wait on the Lord. He gave the desire, and He will not leave it unsatisfied.

II. But though it may sometimes please God in His sovereign wisdom thus to deprive us of spiritual comfort, yet there may be a reason in ourselves-some want of watchfulness, some carelessness of walk, or neglect of means. David seems to have had this in his mind when he said, 'I will behave myself wisely in a perfect way . . . I will walk within my house with a perfect heart.' It is not without meaning that we find this resolution joined to his desire for God's presence. Knowing that any indulgence in what was wrong would come between him and God, he joined to his prayer this earnest resolve, 'I will behave myself wisely in a perfect way . . . I will walk within my house with a perfect heart.'

The word 'perfect' here, as elsewhere, means sincere and upright. His meaning is, that he would be guilty of no double dealing with God. He would not beg God to come to Him, and yet in life and practice depart from God. He would at least be honest and true; he would allow himself in no known sin.

He would behave himself wisely. He would not lead a thoughtless, careless life, spending his time in idle folly; he would be serious, and in earnest. Such, he resolved, should be his walk—his habitual conduct. He would strive to be a true and consistent servant of God.

He makes especial mention of his house. He was placed by God in a higher position than most; for he was a king, the head of a great household, with almost absolute authority over his kingdom. He would try to use this vast influence aright. In his personal conduct he would set an example to all around him. In the ordering of his household he would seek to follow God's holy will. Such was his determination.

Thus his religion was practical as well as spiritual. All true religion is so. We cannot have God's presence unless we walk uprightly. Any sin against conscience, any giving way to worldly customs which we know to be contrary to the word of God, any allowed indulgence of pride or vanity or evil desires, cannot fail to deprive us of the comfort of God's presence He will not dwell with sin. In our inward feelings and in our outward conduct, in private as well as in public life, in our personal behaviour and in our intercourse with others, in thought and word and deed, we must be upright and sincere, if we would have God near.

We might indeed be all this, and yet not have His presence, if not seeking it by Jesus Christ; but though sincerity and uprightness alone could not bring us the blessing, the want of them will certainly deprive us of it.

God will help all who truly desire to have Him as their portion, and set themselves to do His will. He will give them His presence, and keep them by His grace. For such there is every comfort in His word. Let none bear the load of unforgiven sin, while the blood of sprinkling is open to them. Let none be content to live without the happiness of God's presence, when they are encouraged by God Himself to seek it.

Yet let not even the sincere and earnest disciple of Christ expect all to be smooth. Here we must have labour and conflict; for this is not our rest. But this he may confidently believe: that, through light and darkness, God Himself is with him, while he cleaves to Christ and strives to walk with God; that in all his weakness a strength not his own is given him, and will be given even to the end; that God's mercy, favour, and love will never be withdrawn: that infinite love and wisdom will

allow him just so much of the sense of God's presence as is best for his soul; and that the time is not far off, when he, with every true believer, will enjoy the presence of God perfectly and for ever.

SERMON XXVIII.

THE BLESSING OF THE WORD.

MARK, II. 1, 2.—'And again he entered into Capernaum after some days; and it was noised that he was in the house. And straightway many were gathered together, insomuch that there was no room to receive them, no, not so much as about the door: and he preached the word unto them.'

OUR Saviour was almost always followed by a crowd. Wherever He went, a multitude of people generally went with Him, to see and to hear.

It would probably be so in any case in which one went about doing wonderful things, such as no one else could do; especially if they were such things as healing the sick, and making the blind to see, and the lame to walk. If any one could do such things now, he would have a crowd about him wherever he went. Anything new and strange is sure to draw people together. So there is nothing to be surprised at, in a great many people coming to the house where Jesus was, as soon as it was known that He had entered into Capernaum.

But some of them came, not so much to see as to hear. While many were bringing their sick to be made well, and many more were crowding to the place, full of desire to see some wonderful work, others came to listen to what He should say. 'He preached the word unto them,' and they loved to hear it. were not used to such teaching as His. 'Never man spake like this man.' There was a weight and power in His words, such as cannot be described; and the kindness and love with which He spoke melted the hearts of those who heard Him. The subjects too on which He spoke were new and interesting. The teaching of the scribes was chiefly about forms and ceremonies and traditions, with little or nothing either to interest the mind or to touch the heart. Far different was the teaching of Jesus.

We are not told what 'the word' was which He preached to them on this occasion; but perhaps we may gather it from what followed

immediately afterwards. While He is yet speaking, four men come, bearing a sick man on his bed; and not being able to get at Him for the crowd, they uncover the roof and let down the sick man and his bed. What are the first words which Jesus says to him? Not as we might have expected, 'Son, thy sickness is cured;' but 'Son, thy sins be forgiven thee!' Is it not likely that this was the very subject on which Jesus was speaking when the sick man was brought? We know what things He spoke about at other times; the love of God, the way of salvation, rest for the weary, comfort, mercy, pardon, and peace. Probably He was preaching forgiveness of sins at that very time. However this may be, we know that He was preaching some words of truth and love.

We are struck with the happiness of those who were His hearers. Think of the state of the rest of the world at that time. The Jews, it is true, had some light; but the rest of mankind were in pagan darkness; either sunk in ignorance, idolatry, and superstition, or with no better light than that of their own philosophy. In all the world we can find no spot of true and pure spiritual light, except just

there, in the little town of Capernaum, where a crowd of eager listeners is gathered round that open door. How different are those listeners from all mankind beside! There they stand, drinking in the words of life from the lips of the Son of God Himself. Even those on the outskirts of the crowd, who can but catch a word now and then, are happy indeed; for every word they hear is a word of life—good, and true, and gracious, and saving.

We are struck with their happiness: do we think enough of our own? What is the difference between those hearers and us, and between their blessing and ours? There is a difference certainly. But more in the circumstances than in the blessing itself. The chief difference is, that we see no miracles, and that the word is not spoken to us by the lips of Christ Himself. But that is all. The same word is preached to us, though not by His lips. The same word, and even more fully. He Himself said to His disciples, 'I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now. Howbeit, when He, the Spirit of truth, is come, He will guide you into all truth.' * The Spirit of truth has come now,

^{* 1} John, xvi. 12, 13,

and the things which the disciples could not then bear have now been made known to us in the Bible and by the Spirit. Besides, Jesus was not then a crucified and risen Saviour. He had not then finished His work, and ascended again into heaven. But all this has happened now, and we know it. A crucified and risen Saviour is preached to us continually. We have the full word of God, the plain and clear gospel of salvation.

Every Lord's day this gospel is preached from thousands of pulpits in our land. Every day the Scriptures are read aloud in many a Christian family, and in private by millions of readers. The gospel of salvation, the word of life, unchanged and unchangeable, goes down from father to son; and never, in all the ages of the world, were the Scriptures so plentifully dispersed, or so much read. The best of books is the cheapest of books. No book of man is so easy to get as the Book of God. Every household, nay every person, may have it. It is within the reach of all. Are we not happy?

I spoke of the dark state of the rest of the world at the very time when the crowd thronged the doorway at Capernaum to hear our Lord's words. The pagan darkness that was everywhere else makes us think all the more of the happiness of those who heard the word of life. With us the case is the same. At this very time, while we can hear and read the Bible so freely, by far the greater part of mankind are still without it. There are millions to whom the gospel has never yet come. How great are our privileges, compared with theirs! How rich the blessings we enjoy! What manner of persons ought we to be in all holy conversation and godliness?

Let us learn two things from the text:

1. To prize the word. This is the greatest blessing we have. Put in the one scale all temporal blessings, and in the other the word of God, and it outweighs them all. In every age since first the gospel was preached, there have been some highly civilized nations, among whom art and science have flourished. Greece and Rome of old were learned and polished nations; the Chinese of our own time are not without learning and art. Yet Greece and Rome, with all their learning, had not the gospel, and were therefore dark and miserable. And China, with its 360 millions, comprising nearly one-third of the human race, is dark

and miserable too, because without the gospel. The wisest philosopher of Greece or Rome was less wise than the simplest reader of the Bible in our time. The richest mandarin or nobleman in heathen China is poorer by far than any cottager of England, who works hard and fares ill, but who knows the precious word of God. Prize the Bible. Thank God for His Word. Of all your blessings count this the chief.

2. Let us look to it that we turn this blessing to the best account.

Use it diligently, both in hearing and in reading it. Be not content with hearing it only when it is quite convenient, or reading it when it falls in with the wish of the moment. Take trouble about it. Be diligent and self-denying. Think what the word of God is, and for what purpose it is given. Let not a trifle keep you from the house of God, and let nothing short of necessity be suffered to interfere with the daily reading of the Bible in private. 'Desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby.'* Let not an unread Bible, or preaching that you would not go to hear, condemn you hereafter.

^{* 1} Pet. ii. 2.

Yet be not content with hearing and reading. These are not the end, but the means. Be not hearers only, or readers only. Receive the word into the heart. Drink in the spirit of it. The word of God is not merely a sound to listen to, or so many sentences to read. It is a message from God. It is His will made known to man; the gospel, or good news, of salvation.

It tells us what we are in His sight, and how we may be saved. It warns us of danger, and points out the escape. It shows us whom to go to, and what to ask for. It tells us of the Holy Spirit the Comforter. It makes known to us Christ; and in Him pardon, life, salvation, heaven. The very words which Jesus spoke are written there. The very things which He did are there related.

The word of God is meant to lead sinners to Christ the Saviour. If it do not lead you to Him, it does not do its proper work in you, and you receive it in vain. Oh! receive it not in vain. Pray for the Holy Spirit to teach you, and to impress the word on your heart. How sad it would be, to have had the Bible all your life, and yet to be found at last with no part in Christ, and no share in His salvation!

SERMON XXIX.

GOD'S JUDGMENTS RIGHT.

Ps. cxix. 75.—'I know, O Lord, that thy judgments are right, and that thou in faithfulness hast afflicted me.'

THE psalmist prayed for understanding (ver. 73); 'Give me understanding, that I may learn Thy commandments.' Yet it is plain that understanding had already been given to him, or he could not have felt what he expresses here; for none but those who are taught of God take such a view of affliction, and of God's dealings in general. But any measure of spiritual light begets a desire for more; and any true knowledge of God makes us wish to know Him better.

The text is in the form of an address to God. We often find this in David, that when he would express some deep feeling, or some point of spiritual experience, he does so in this way—addressing himself to God. Those who love God delight to hold communion with Him; and there are some feelings which the spiritual mind finds peculiar comfort and pleasure in telling to God Himself.

'I know, O Lord, that Thy judgments are right.' God orders all things, and His judgments here mean His general orderings, decisions, dealings—not afflictions only, though including them. And when the psalmist says, 'Thy judgments,' he means especially God's judgments towards him, God's dealings with him, and thus all that had happened to him, or should happen to him. For in the psalmist's creed there was no such thing as chance. God ordered all that befell him, and he loved to think so.

He expresses a sure and happy confidence in all that God did, and would do, with regard to him. He trusted fully in God's wisdom, God's power, God's love. 'I know that thy judgments are right'—quite right, right in every way, without one single point that might have been better, perfectly wise and good. He shows the firmest persuasion of this. 'I know,' he says; not merely, 'I think.'

But these very words, 'I know,' clearly show that this was a matter of faith, not of sight. 'For he does not say,' 'I can see that Thy judgments are right;' but 'I know.' The meaning plainly is, 'Though I cannot see all,—though there are some things in Thy dealings which I cannot fully understand,—yet I believe, I am persuaded, and thus I know, O Lord, that Thy judgments are right.'

'Thy judgments.' Not some of them, but He takes into view all God's dealings all. with him, and says of them without exception, 'I know, O Lord, that thy judgments are right.' When the things that happen to us are plainly for our comfort and good, as many of them are, then we thankfully receive what God thus sends to us, and own Him as the Giver of all, and bless Him for His gracious dealing; and this is right. But all the faith required for this (and some faith there is in it) is to own God as dealing with us, instead of thanklessly receiving the gifts with no thought of the Giver. It is a far higher degree of faith, that says of all God's dealings, even when seemingly not for our happiness, 'I know that thy judgments are right.'

Yet this is the meaning here, or certainly

the chief meaning. For though the word 'judgments' does mean God's dealings of every kind, yet here the words that follow make it apply especially to God's afflictive dealings, that is, to those dealings of His that do not seem to be for our happiness; 'I know, O Lord, that thy judgments are right, and that thou in faithfulness hast afflicted me.' The judgments which the psalmist chiefly had in view, and which he felt so sure were right, were not joys, but sorrows; not things bestowed, but things taken away; those blessings in disguise, those veiled mercies, those gifts clad in the garb of mourning, which God so often sends to His children. The psalmist knew, and knew against all appearance to the contrary, that these judgments were right. Whatever they might be - losses, bereavements, disappointments, pain, sickness—they were right; as right as the more manifest blessings which went before them; quite right, perfectly right; so right that they could not have been better; just what were best; and all, because they were Gon's judgments. That one thing satisfied the psalmist's mind, and set every doubt at rest. The dealings in themselves he might have doubted, but he could not doubt

Him whose dealings they were. 'Thy judgments.' That settled all.

'And that thou in faithfulness hast afflicted me.' This means that, in appointing trouble as his lot, God had dealt with him in faithfulness to His word, faithfulness to His purposes of mercy, with a faithful, not a weak love. He had sent him just what was most for his good, though not always what was most pleasing; and in this He had shown Himself faithful. Gently and lovingly does the Lord deal with His children. He gives no unnecessary pain; but that which is needful He will not withhold.

Yet it requires strong faith to say this of God's dealings with oneself, 'I know, O Lord, that thy judgments are right, and that thou in faithfulness hast afflicted me.' We can read of the afflictions of those who have gone before us, and can see that God's dealings with them were right, and faithful, and good; we can look around on the present trials of others, and see and own the same with regard to them; but when these painful dealings come to ourselves, and we are they whom God shows His faithfulness in afflicting, then it is a harder matter to feel thus.

We must know God for this. We must be able to see His dealings, not as the dealings of a stranger, but as those of a Friend and Father. We cannot really know His dealings, till we know Him. It is only when we have acquainted ourselves with God, that we can be at peace under His afflicting hand. It is when we have learnt to know Him as reconciled to us in Christ Jesus, the God of love, our God—it is then, and then only, that we see that all is well, and must be well, that He does.

We can trust Him then. We can raise our eyes, and look beyond the things that are happening to us, and see through the cloud that seems to surround us, and behold the hand of unerring wisdom and love ordering all. He sees the end from the beginning. He is working for eternity. 'It shall be well.' Let the trial be very grievous—some great cutting off, some sad, sad stroke—yet does not He send it? Could it come without Him? It is in verv faithfulness that He deals thus with us. stroke was needed, therefore He sent it. He will not now forsake us. He will be faithful still-faithful in supporting, cheering, comforting; faithful in hearing prayer, in sending

help, in speaking peace—faithful in smiting, faithful in healing.

Indeed, apart from all other comforts which God can give, there is comfort in the very exercise of faith. Doubtless David felt comforted when he said, 'I know, O Lord, that Thy judgments are right: 'and Job, when he said, 'Though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him.' When the heart thus goes up to God from the very depths of trouble, there is a sense of comfort and blessing at the very time. God is felt to be near, and His peace is experienced in the heart. Happy they who have learnt thus to feel, and thus to speak, when God's hand is upon them. Happy they who are even now learning this lesson in the school of God. And what are we all but learners to the last? I said just now that we must know God, in order to know His dealings; but it is equally true that it is by means of His dealings with us, that we learn to know more of God. Who that has drunk of the cup of sorrow, and found it through grace a wholesome draught, but can testify to this?

It is a blessed thing to be brought now to own God's dealings right. All must own them so hereafter. When at last He shall bring down the pride of the stout-hearted, and put forth His mighty power against the rebellious, and cause every hardened and impenitent sinner to submit, then there will not be one but will be forced to own, 'I know, O Lord, that Thy judgments are right.' Not one will hereafter be able to say that he has been dealt hardly with, that he was not warned, that no mercy was offered him, no forbearance shown him. Every mouth will be speechless before Him, or will only speak to own Him right and faithful.

Ah! learn to know Him, love Him, trust Him, now. Submit to His grace; do not wait till you must submit to His power. All is dark to one who does not know God in Christ: to such an one God's ways are dark, and His dealings are dark; the present is dark, the future is dark. But to the believer all is bright. Through all that befalls him, he can say, or at least he is learning to say, in the confidence of a trusting and loving heart, 'I know, O Lord, that Thy judgments are right, and that Thou in faithfulness hast afflicted me.'

SERMON XXX.

THE CONTINUING CITY.

Heb. xiii. 14.—'For here have we no continuing city, but we seek one to come.'

PART of this verse is true of all, but part is true of some only. It is true of all, that here we have no continuing city; but it is not true of all, that we are seeking one to come. Paul was, and so were many of those to whom he wrote; but probably not all even of them, and certainly not all who now call, themselves Christians.

Let us take the two parts of the text separately:

1. First let us consider the part that is true of all: 'Here have we no continuing city.'

The meaning is, that here, in this world, we

have no lasting dwelling-place. We are not always to stay where we are.

This is nothing new. Everybody knows this, everybody believes it, no one can doubt it. Yet do all *really* believe it?

Suppose you saw a man busily engaged in improving his house, taking great pains about it, and spending much money upon it, always doing something to make it more comfortable and beautiful, and seemingly wrapped up in the work; should you not conclude, either that the house was his own, or that at least he had a long lease of it? You would feel sure that he would not do thus with a house which he might have to leave to-morrow. If he had no good prospect of keeping possession of it, he would not take so much pains, or lay out so much money.

Yet that which is so unlikely about a man and a house, is just what thousands are doing in a far more important concern. They know they have not here a continuing city, yet they act just as if they had. They are quite aware that they have but a short time to spend in this world—how short, they cannot tell—yet they are living as if they were to stay here always. They give no thought to eternity, or next to

none; they are all for this world. And therefore it is very necessary to remind people solemnly of what the text says. Everybody knows it, it is true, but thousands forget or disregard it. It is believed, and yet not believed; certainly it is overlooked.

'Here have we no continuing city.' This is true of us all—of rich and poor, of old and young, of the sick and of the strong. Whatever our lot in life may be, whether we have a happy lot or a hard life, whether we have many possessions or scarcely any, this is true of us all, 'Here have we no continuing city.'

We have no freehold, we have not even a long lease, of this life with its possessions and pleasures. We are but tenants at will, the will of God. He will put us out when it pleases Him; it all rests with Him. And He does not tell us the time when He will do so: only He tells us that our term is short, and that it may come to a sudden end.

We are warned of this, not only by the word of God, but also by what we see around us. Death is teaching us this lesson continually. The mother of a young family is seized with sudden illness, and in a few days she is gone. She was but young herself, and it seemed likely that she would live many years and see her children grow up around her. But it was not to be so: God willed it otherwise. What does such a case teach us, but that 'here have we no continuing city?' A strong man goes to his work in the morning, and in the evening is brought home a corpse; some unexpected accident has cut short his course. Does not this teach us the same? An old man, who has long been failing, dies at last. Nobody is surprised. It is what all have been expecting. He lived his eighty years or so, and his time seemed to be come. Yet even an every-day case like this says just the same to us, 'Here have we no continuing city.'

Even the man who loves the world most dearly, cannot stay in it. He may have strong ties to it, and many and great concerns in it; large possessions, a loving family, attached friends, numbers who would keep him here still. Yet, when his time comes, he must go. His ties, his possessions, his mourning friends, may remain; but he must leave them all, when God sends for him. A messenger comes, to whose call he cannot be deaf; death will take no denial. 'Here have we no continuing city.' This is true of all.

2. But there is a continuing city; not here, but beyond the grave; not present, but to come. We are seeking it, says the apostle; 'we seek one to come,' a continuing city to come, or rather the continuing city that is to come, for there is but one. Alas! this part of the text is not true of all.

It is called here a city; and in other parts of Scripture the same figure is used. It is a great, holy, happy, glorious city. It was shown to St. John in the Revelation: 'And I. John, saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. . . . And I saw no temple therein; for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are the temple of it. And there shall be no more curse: but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it; and His servants shall serve Him: and they shall see His face; and His name shall be in their foreheads. And there shall be no night there; and they need no candle, neither light of the sun; for the Lord God giveth them light: and they shall reign for ever and ever.'*

This glorious city is a continuing city: it will last for ever, and they who once enter it

* Rev. xxi. 2, 22; xxii. 3-5.

will never be called to leave it. There will be no going out, no change, no death. This is that city for which Abraham and the saints of old looked: 'For he looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God.' 'But now they desire a better country, that is an heavenly: wherefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for He hath prepared for them a city.'*

The saints of old sought this city, and now the believer, with clearer light than they had, is seeking the same. True, there is in his desires and aims much mixture of human corruption, and much that is worldly still cleaves to him; vet in the main his affections are fixed on the continuing city. Where his treasure is, there is his heart also. The whole tone of his life shows it: 'For they that say such things declare plainly that they seek a country.' + He is no longer wrapped up in worldly pleasures or pursuits. He has in a measure learnt the vanity of earthly things, and set his affection on things above. Yet he does not neglect his duty here below. Never was he so desirous of serving God upon earth, as he has been since he began to seek the continuing city. His

^{*} Heb. xi. 10, 16.

⁺ Heb. xi. 14.

heart's desire is, first to do his Master's will here, and then to go to that eternal rest and glory which his Master has prepared for him above. Thus he seeks, and thus he serves, not merely now and then, from an occasional impulse, but from a deep and abiding principle. This is his life, his settled course. He lives as one whose rest is not here. He is but a traveller, passing to his home. Here has he no continuing city, but he seeks one to come, and seeks it first, above all other things whatever.

Is this true of you? The former part of the text certainly is; here have you no continuing city: but is *this* part true of you also? are you seeking one to come?

Upon what is your heart fixed? What are your aims in life? What are you thinking of, trusting in, hoping for, looking forward to? Have you even begun to seek the continuing city?

Oh, if not, lose no more time! Set out at once. This is no time for delay: the world passeth away; eternity comes on apace. There is but one way to the continuing city—Christ is the way. The way is open; He Himself calls you. 'The Spirit and the Bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come. And let

him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely.'* All is ready; the city is prepared, the way is ready, the Saviour is ready. May God the Holy Spirit make you ready, too; ready to seek now, through Jesus Christ, that continuing city which is to come.

* Rev. xxii. 17.

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